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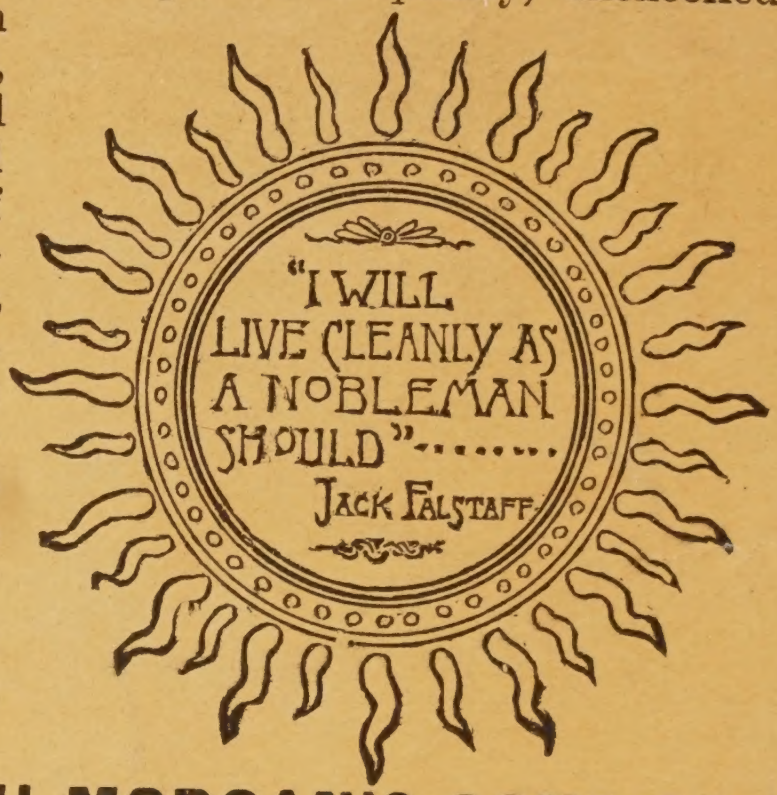

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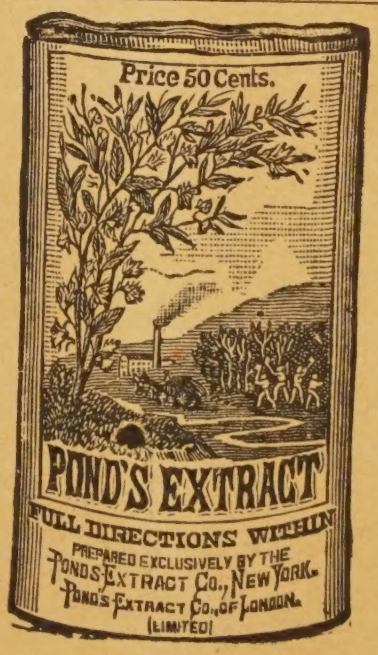

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THE TIGER-SLAYER.

CHAPTER I.

LA FERIA DE PLATA.

About ten years back the discovery of the rich Californian plains awakened suddenly the adventurous instincts of thousands of young and intelligent men, who, leaving country and family, rushed, full of enthusiasm, towards the new Eldorado, where the majority only met with misery and death, after sufferings and vexations innumerable.

The road from Europe to California is a long one. Many persons stopped half way; some at Valparaiso; others at Callao; others, again, at Mazatlan or San Blas, though the majority reached San Francisco.

It is not within the scope of our story to give the details, too well known at present, of all the deceptions by which the luckless emigrants were assailed with the first step they took on this land, where they imagined they needed only to stoop and pick up handsful of gold.

We must ask our readers to accompany us to Guaymas six months after the discovery of the placers.

The State of Sonora is one of the richest in Mexico, owing to the numerous gold mines by which its soil is veined. Unfortunately, or fortunately, according to the point of view from which we like to regard it, Sonora is incessantly traversed by innumerable Indian tribes, against which the inhabitants wage a constant war. Thus the continual engagements with these savage hordes, the contempt of life, and the habit of shedding human blood on the slightest pretext, have given the Sonorians a haughty and decided bearing, and imprinted on them a stamp of nobility and grandeur, which separates them entirely from the other states, and causes them to be recognised at the first glance.

In spite of its great extent of territory and lengthened seaboard, Mexico possesses in reality only two ports on the Pacific—Guaymas and Acapulco.

We shall only speak here of Guaymas. This town, founded but a few years back on the mouth of the San José, seems destined to become, ere long, one of the chief Pacific ports. Its military position is admirable. Like all the Spanish American towns, the houses are low, whitewashed, and flat-roofed. The fort, situated on the summit of a rock, in which some cannon rust on carriages peeling

away beneath the sun, is of a yellow hue, harmonising with the ochre tinge of the beach. Behind the town rise lofty, scarped mountains, their sides furrowed with ravines hollowed out by the waters of the rainy season, and their brown peaks lost in the clouds.

Unhappily, we are compelled to avow that this port, despite of its ambitious title of town, is still a miserable village, without church or hotel. We do not say there are no drinking-shops; on the contrary, as may be imagined in a port so near San Francisco, they swarm.

The day on which our story commences, at about two in the afternoon, in spite of the red-hot sun which poured its beams on the town, Guaymas, generally so quiet at that hour, when the inhabitants, overcome by the heat, are asleep indoors, presented an animated appearance, which would have surprised the stranger whom accident had taken there at the moment, and would have caused him to suppose, most assuredly, that he was about to witness one of those thousand *pronunciamentos* which annually break out in this wretched province. Still, it was nothing of the sort. The military authority, represented by General San Benito, Governor of Guaymas, was, or seemed to be, satisfied with the government. The smugglers, leperos, and hiaquis continued in a tolerably satisfactory state, without complaining too much of the powers that were. Whence, then, the extraordinary agitation that prevailed in the town?

For three days the town had been a prey to the gold fever. The governor, yielding to the supplications of several considerable merchants, had authorised for five days a *feria de plata*, or, literally, a silver fair.

Gambling-tables, held by persons of distinction, were publicly open in the principal houses; but the fact which gave this festival a strangeness impossible to find elsewhere was, that monté tables were displayed in every street and in the open air, on which gold tinkled, and where everybody possessed of a real had the right to risk it, without distinction of caste or colour.

In Mexico everything is done differently from other countries. The inhabitants of this country, having no reminiscences of the past which they wish to forget, no faith in the future in which they do not believe, only live for the present.

The Mexicans have two marked tastes which govern them entirely, play and love. We say tastes, and not passions, for the Mexicans are not capable of those great emotions which conquer the will.

The groups round the monté tables were numerous and animated. Still, everything went on with an order and tranquillity which nothing troubled.

About half way up the Calle de la Merced, one of the wildest in Guaymas, and opposite a house of goodly appearance, there stood a table covered with a green baize, and piled up with gold ounces, behind which a man of about thirty, with a crafty face, was stationed, who, with a pack of cards in his hand, and a smile on his lips, invited by the most insinuating remarks the numerous spectators who surrounded him to tempt fortune.

"Come, caballeros," he said in a honeyed tone, "I cannot always win; luck is going to turn, I am sure. Here are one hundred ounces: who will cover them?"

No one answered.

The banker, not allowing himself to be defeated, let a tinkling cascade of ounces slide through his fingers.

"It is a nice sum, caballeros, one hundred ounces. Come, who will cover them?"

"Bah!" a lepero said, "what are one hundred ounces? Had you not won my last, Tio Lucas, I would cover them."

"I am in despair, Senor Cucharès," the banker replied, with a bow, "that luck was so much against you, and I should feel delighted to lend you an ounce."

"You are jesting," the lepero said. "Keep your gold, Tio Lucas; I know the way to procure as much as I want, whenever I think proper; but," he added, "I am none the less grateful to you."

And he offered the banker across the table his hand, which the latter pressed with great cordiality.

The lepero profited by the occasion to pick up with his free hand a pile of twenty ounces that was in his reach.

After this interchange of good offices there was a moment's silence. The spectators had seen everything that occurred, and therefore awaited with some curiosity the *dénouement* of this scene. Senor Cucharès was the first to renew the conversation.

"Oh!" he suddenly shouted, striking his forehead, "I believe that I am losing my head."

"Why so, caballero?" Tio Lucas asked.

"*Carai!* it's very simple," the other went on. "Did I not tell you just now that you had won all my money?"

"You certainly said so."

"I remember it perfectly, and it is that which makes me so mad."

"What!" the banker exclaimed with feigned astonishment, "you are mad because I won from you?"

"*Caramba!* it is because I made a mistake, and I have some ounces still left."

"Impossible!"

"Just see, then!"

The lepero put his hand in his pocket, and, with unparalleled effrontery, displayed to the banker the gold he had just stolen from him. But the latter did not wince.

"It is incredible," he merely said.

"Eh?" the lepero interjected.

"Yes, it is incredible that you, Senor Cucharès, should have made such a slip of memory."

"Well, as I have remembered it, all can be put right now; we can continue our game."

"Very good; one hundred ounces is the stake."

"Then you won't cover twenty ounces?"

"I cannot; I would not cover one short of a hundred."

"H'm!" the lepero went on, knitting his brows, "is that meant for an insult, Tio Lucas?"

The banker had no time to reply; for a man of about thirty, mounted on a magnificent black horse, had stopped for a few seconds before the table, and, while carelessly smoking a cigar, listened to the discussion.

"Done for one hundred ounces!" he said, and dropped a purse full of gold.

The two speakers suddenly raised their heads.

"Here are the cards, caballero," the banker hastened to say. Cucharès shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"Oh!" he muttered to himself, "the Tigrero! Has he come for Anita? I must know that."

And he gently drew near the stranger, who was a tall man, with an olive complexion, a piercing glance, and an open and resolute face. His dress, of the greatest richness, glistened with gold and diamonds. He wore, slightly inclined over his left ear, a broad-brimmed sombrero, surrounded by a golilla of fine gold; his spencer of blue cloth, embroidered with silver, allowed a dazzling white shirt to be seen, under the collar of which passed a cravat of China crape, fastened with a diamond ring, his calzoneras, drawn up round the hips by a red silk scarf with gold-fringed ends

and two rows of diamond buttons, were open at the side, and allowed his *calzon* to float beneath; he wore *botas vaqueras* of figured leather, richly embroidered, attached below the knee by a garter of silver tissue; while his *manga*, glistening with gold, hung coquettishly from his right shoulder.

His horse, with a small head, and legs fine as spindles, was splendidly accoutred: *las armas de agua* and the *zarape* fastened to the croup, and the magnificent *anquera* adorned with steel chains, completed a caparison of which we can form no idea in Europe.

This man was the perfect type of a Mexican of Sonora—ever ready for peace or war, fearing the one no more than he despised the other. After bowing politely to Tio Lucas, he took the cards the latter offered him, and shuffled them while looking around him.

"Ah!" he said, casting a friendly glance to the lepero, "you're here, gossip Cucharès?"

"At your service, Don Martial," the other replied.

"Be good enough to cut for me while I light my pajillo."

"With pleasure," the lepero exclaimed.

El Tigrero, or Don Martial, whichever the reader may please to call him, took a gold *mechero* from his pocket, and carelessly struck a light while the lepero cut the cards.

"Senor," the latter said in a piteous voice.

"Well?"

"You have lost."

"Good. Tio Lucas, take a hundred ounces from my purse."

"Would you please to play again?"

"Certainly, but not for such trifles."

"I will cover any stake your excellency may like to name," the banker said.

"H'm! are you really ready to cover any stake I name?"

"Yes."

"Even if I played for a thousand gold ounces?"

"I would cover double that if your excellency dares to stake it," the banker said imperturbably.

"I do dare it," said the horseman.

"Two thousand ounces, then?"

"Agreed."

"Shall I cut?" Cucharès asked timidly.

"Why not?" the other asked lightly.

The lepero seized the cards with a hand trembling from emotion. At this moment a window opened in the house before which Tio Lucas had established his monté table, and a charming girl leant carelessly over the balcony.

"I salute the lovely Anita," said the stranger, as he doffed his hat.

The girl blushed, bent on him an expressive glance from beneath her long velvety eyelashes, but made no reply.

"You have lost, excellency," Tio Lucas said.

"Very good," the stranger replied, without even looking at him.

"You play no more?"

"On the contrary, I double."

"What!" exclaimed the banker, falling back a step in spite of himself at this proposition.

"No, I am wrong; I have something else to propose."

"What is it, excellency?"

"How much have you there?" he said, pointing to the table with a disdainful gesture.

"Why, at least seven thousand ounces."

"Not more? That's very little."

The spectators regarded with a stupor, mingled with terror, this extraordinary man, who played for ounces and diamonds as others did for ochavos. The girl became pale. She turned a supplicating glance to the stranger.

"Play no more," she murmured in a trembling voice.

"Thanks," he exclaimed, "senorita; your beautiful eyes will bring me fortune. I would give all the gold on the table for the suchil flower you hold in your hand."

"Do not play, Don Martial," the girl repeated, as she retired and closed the window. But, through accident or some other reason, her hand let loose the flower. The horseman made his steed bound forward, caught it in its flight, and buried it in his bosom.

"Cucharès," he then said to the lepero, "turn up a card"

The latter obeyed. "*Seis de copas!*" he said.

"*Voto à brios!*" the stranger exclaimed, "the colour of the heart, we shall win. Tio Lucas, I will back this card against all the gold you have on your table."

The banker turned pale and hesitated.

"Bah!" he thought, after a minute's reflection, "it is impossible for him to win. I accept, excellency."

"Count the sum you have."

"That is unnecessary, senor; there are nine thousand four hundred and fifty gold ounces."

At the statement of this formidable amount the spectators gave vent to a shout of admiration.

"I fanced you richer," the stranger said ironically. "Well, so be it, then."

"Will you cut this time, excellency?"

"No, I am thoroughly convinced you are going to lose, Tio Lucas, and I wish you to be quite convinced that I have won fairly. In consequence, do me the pleasure of cutting yourself."

The spectators quivered with pleasure on seeing the chivalrous way in which the stranger behaved. At this moment the street was thronged with people. A deadly silence prevailed through the crowd, so great was the interest that each felt in the *dénouement* of this grand and hitherto unexampled match. The banker wiped away the perspiration that beaded on his livid brow, and seized the first card with a trembling hand. He balanced it for a few seconds between finger and thumb.

"Make haste," Cucharès cried to him with a grin.

Tio Lucas mechanically let the card fall as he turned his head away.

"*Seis de copas!*" the lepero shouted in a hoarse voice.

"I have lost!" muttered the banker.

"I was sure of it," the horseman said, still impassible. "Cucharès," he added, "carry that table and the gold upon it to Dona Anita. I shall expect you to-night you know where."

The lepero bowed respectfully. Assisted by two sturdy fellows, he executed the order he had just received, and entered the house, while the stranger started off at a gallop; and Tio Lucas, slightly recovered from the stunning blow he had received, philosophically twisted a cigar, repeating to those who forced their consolations upon him—

"I have lost, it is true, but against a very fair player, and for a good stake. Bah! I shall have my revenge some day."

CHAPTER II.

DON SYLVA DE TORRES.

GUAYMAS is quite a new town, built somewhat from day to day according to the fancy of the emigrants, and hence no regular lines of streets have been maintained. However, we had better mention here that, with the exception of a few houses to which that name may be fairly given, all the rest are frightful dens, built of mud, and deplorably dirty.

In the Calle de la Merced, the principal, or, to speak more truthfully, the only street in the town (for the others are only alleys), stood a one-storied house, ornamented with a balcony, and a peristyle supported by four pillars. The front was covered by a coating of lime of dazzling whiteness, and the roof was flat.

The proprietor of this house was one of the richest *mineros* in Sonora, and possessor of a dozen mines, all in work.

I am certain that, if Don Sylva de Torrès had wished to liquidate his fortune, and discover what he was really worth, it would have realized several millions.

Don Sylva had come to live in Guaymas some months back, where he ordinarily only paid flying visits, and those at lengthened intervals. This time, contrary to his usual custom, he had brought his daughter Anita with him.

Shut up in his house, the doors of which only opened to a few privileged persons, Don Sylva did not seem to trouble himself the least in the world about the gossips.

Though the Mexicans are excessively rich, and like to do honour to their wealth, they have no idea of comfort. The utmost carelessness prevails among them.

These men, principally accustomed to the rude life of the American deserts, to struggle continually against the changes of a climate which is frequently deadly, and the unceasing aggressions of the Indians, who surround them on all sides, camp rather than live in the towns, fancying they have done everything when they have squandered gold and diamonds.

The Mexican houses are in evidence to prove the correctness of our opinion. With the exception of the inevitable European piano, which swaggers in the corner of every drawing-room, you only see a few clumsy *butacas*, rickety tables, bad engravings hanging on the white-washed walls, and that is all.

Don Sylva's house differed in no respect from the others; and the master's horses, on returning to their stable from the watering-place, had to cross the *salon*, all dripping as they were.

At the moment when we introduce the reader into Don Sylva's house, two persons, male and female, were sitting in the saloon talking.

They were Don Sylva and his daughter Anita. The crossing of the Spanish and Indian races has produced the most perfect plastic type to be found anywhere. Don Sylva, although nearly fifty years of age, did not appear to be forty. He was tall, upright, and his face, though stern, had great gentleness imprinted upon it.

Anita, who reclined on a sofa, half buried in masses of silk and gauze, like a humming-bird concealed in moss, was a charming girl of eighteen at the most, whose black eyes, modestly veiled by long velvety lashes, were full of voluptuous promise, which was not gainsaid by the undulating and serpentine outlines of her exquisitely-modelled body. Her slightest gestures had a grace and majesty completed by the ravishing smile of her coral lips.

Like all Mexican women when at home, she merely wore a light robe of em-

broidered muslin; her *rebozo* was thrown negligently over her shoulders, and a profusion of jasmine flowers was intertwined in her bluish-black tresses. Anita seemed deep in thought. At one moment the arch of her eyebrows was contracted by some thought that annoyed her, her bosom heaved, and her dainty foot, cased in a slipper lined with swan's down, impatiently tapped the ground.

Don Sylva presently said,—

"You are mad, Anita; your behaviour is most extravagant."

The young Mexican girl only answered by a significant pout.

"Especially," her father continued, laying a stress on each word, "in your position as regards the Count de Lhorailles."

The girl started as if a serpent had stung her, and replied,—

"I do not understand you, my father."

"You do not understand me, Anita. Have I not formally promised your hand to him?"

"What matter, if I do not love him?"

"Poor child! you are still, thank heaven, at that happy age when the heart does not know itself, and when the words 'happiness, unhappiness,' have no meaning. You do not love the count, you say. All the better. When you have had occasion to appreciate the noble qualities of the man I give you as husband, you will then thank me for having insisted on this marriage."

"Stay, father," the girl said, with an air of vexation. "My heart is not free, and you are well aware of the fact."

"I know, Dona Anita de Torrès," the haciendero answered severely, "that a love unworthy of yourself and me cannot enter your heart. Through my ancestors I am a Christiano Viejo; and if a few drops of Indian blood be mingled in my veins, what I owe to the memory of my ancestors is deeply engraved on my mind. The first of our family, Antonio de Sylva, lieutenant to Hernando Cortez, married, it is true, a Mexican princess of the family of Moctecuzoma."

"Are we not Mexicans, then, my father?"

"Alas! my poor child, who can say who we are and what we are? Our unhappy country, since it shook off the Spanish yoke, has been struggling convulsively. These disgraceful contests render us the laughing-stock of other peoples, and, above all, cause the joy of our greedy neighbours, who, with their eyes invariably fixed upon us, are preparing to enrich themselves with our spoils."

"But, my father, I am a woman, and therefore unaffected by politics."

"More than you may imagine, my child. I do not wish that at a given day the immense property my ancestors and myself have acquired by our toil should become the prey of these accursed heretics. In order to save it, I have resolved on marrying you to the Count de Lhorailles. He is a Frenchman, and belongs to one of the noblest families of that country. Besides, he is a handsome and brave gentleman. He is a member of a powerful and respected nation, which knows how to protect its subjects."

"But I do not love him, father."

"Nonsense, my dear babe. I am willing to forget the folly of which you were guilty a few moments back, but on condition that you forget that man."

"Never!" she exclaimed resolutely.

"Never! That is a long time, my daughter. Besides, who is this man? What is his family? He is called Martial el Tigrero. *Voto à Dios*, that is not a name That man saved your life by stopping your horse when it ran away. Well, is that a reason for him to fall in love with you, and you with him? I offered him a magnificent reward, which he refused with the most supreme disdain. There is an end of it."

"I love him, father," the young girl repeated.

"Listen, Anita. You would make me angry, if I did not put a restraint on myself. Enough on that head. Prepare to receive the Count de Lhorailles in a proper manner. I have sworn that you shall be his wife."

The haciendero pronounced these words with such resolution in his voice, and such a fierce accent, that the girl saw it would be better for her to appear to yield, and put a stop to a discussion which would only grow more embittered, and perhaps have grave consequences.

The door was partly opened, and a peon thrust his head discreetly through the crevice.

"What do you want?" Don Sylva asked.

"Excellency," the man replied, "a caballero, followed by four others, bearing a table covered with pieces of gold, requests an audience of the senorita."

The haciendero shot a glance at his daughter full of expressiveness. Dona Anita let her head sink in confusion.

"Let him come in," said Don Sylva.

The peon withdrew; but he returned in a few seconds, preceding an old acquaintance, Cucharès, still enwrap ed in his ragged zarape, and directing the four leperos who carried the table. On entering the saloon, Cucharès uncovered respectfully, courteously saluted the haciendero and his daughter, and with a sign ordered the porters to deposit the table in the centre of the apartment.

"Senorita," he said in a honeyed voice, "the Senor Don Martial, faithful to the pledge he made you, humbly supplicates you to accept his gains at montè."

"You rascal!" Don Sylva angrily exclaimed. "Do you know in whose presence you are?"

"In that of Dona Anita and her highly-respected parent," the scamp replied imperturbably. "I have not, to my knowledge, failed in respect."

"Withdraw at once, and take with you this gold, which does not concern my daughter."

"Excuse me, excellency, I received orders to bring the gold here, and with your permission I will leave it. Don Martial would not forgive me."

"I do not know Don Martial, as it pleases you to call the man who sent you."

"That is possible, excellency; but it is no affair of mine. You can have an explanation with him if you think proper. For my part, I kiss your hands."

And, after bowing once more to the two, the lepero went off majestically, followed by his four acolytes.

"See there," Don Sylva exclaimed; "see there, my daughter, to what insults your folly exposes me."

"An insult, my father?" she replied timidly. "On the contrary, I think that Don Martial has acted like a true caballero. The sum is enormous."

"Ah!" Don Sylva said, wrathfully, "that is the way you take it. Come here, some one!"

Several peons came in.

"Open the windows!" he ordered.

The servants obeyed. The crowd was not yet dispersed, and a large number of persons was still collected round the house. The haciendero leant out, and by a wave of his hand requested silence. The crowd was instinctively silent.

"*Senores caballeros y amijos,*" the haciendero said, in a powerful voice, "a man whom I do not know has dared to offer to my daughter the money he has won. Dona Anita spurns such presents, and begs me to distribute this gold among you, as she will not touch it in any way: she desires thus to prove, in the presence of you all, the contempt she feels for a man who has dared to offer her such an insult."

The speech improvised by the haciendero was drowned by the frenzied applause of

the leperos and other assembled beggars, whose eyes sparkled with greed. Anita felt the burning tears swelling her eyelids.

Troubling himself not at all about his daughter, Don Sylva ordered his servants to cast the ounces into the street. A shower of gold then literally began falling on the wretches, who rushed with incredible ardour on this new species of manna. The Calle de la Merced offered, at that moment, the most singular sight imaginable. The gold poured and poured on; it seemed to be inexhaustible. The beggars leaped like coyotes on the precious metal, overthrowing and trampling under foot the weaker.

At the height of the shower a horseman came galloping up. Astonished, confounded by what he saw, he stopped for a moment to look around him.

"Here is the count," Don Sylva said laconically to his daughter.

In fact, within a minute that gentleman entered the saloon.

"Halloh!" he said, stopping in the doorway, "what strange notion is this of yours, Don Sylva? On my soul, you are amusing yourself by throwing millions out of window."

"Ah, 'tis you, Senor Conde," the haciendero replied calmly; "you are welcome. I shall be with you in an instant. Only these few handsful."

"Don't hurry yourself," the count said, with a laugh. "I confess that the fancy is original;" and, drawing near the young lady, he continued,—

"Would you deign, senorita, to give me the word of this enigma, which, I confess, interests me in the highest degree."

"Ask my father, senor," she answered.

The count feigned not to notice this rebuff.

"I will wait; I am in no hurry," he said coolly.

The haciendero, in telling his daughter that the husband he intended for her was a handsome man, had not flattered him. Count Maxime Gaetan de Lhorailles was a man of thirty at the most, well built and active, and slightly above the middle height. His light hair allowed him to be recognized as a son of the north; his features were fine, his glance expressive, and his hands and feet denoted race.

At length the haciendero exhausted all the gold; he then hurled the table into the street, and came back to take a seat by the side of the count, rubbing his hands.

"There," he said, with a joyous air, "that's finished. Now I am quite at your service."

"First one word."

"Ten if you like."

"Well, what were you doing when I arrived?—that gold you were dropping like a beneficent dew on the bandits of every description collected before your house; ill weeds, between ourselves, to be thus bedewed."

"It is not a custom of ours," Don Sylva replied.

"Very good. Then, you were indulging in the regal pastime of throwing a million to the scum. Plague! Don Sylva, a man must be rich as yourself to do such things."

"Things are not as you fancy."

"Still, I saw it raining ounces."

"True, but they did not belong to me."

"That renders the affair more complicated."

"I will satisfy you."

"I am all attention, for the affair is growing as interesting to me as a story in the 'Arabian Nights.'"

"H'm!" the haciendero said, tossing his head, "it interests you more than you perhaps suspect."

Dona Anita was in torture; she knew not what to do. Seeing that her father

was about to divulge all to the count, she did not feel in herself the courage to be present at such a revelation, and rose tottering.

"Gentlemen," she said, in a feeble voice, "I feel indisposed; be kind enough to allow me to retire."

"Really," the count said, "you are pale, Dona Anita. Allow me to accompany you to your apartment."

"I thank you, caballero, but I am strong enough to proceed there alone—grateful for your offer."

"As you please, senorita," the count replied, inwardly piqued by this refusal.

Don Sylva entertained for a moment the idea of ordering his daughter to remain; but the poor girl turned toward him so despairing a glance that he did not feel the courage to impose on her a longer torture.

"Go, my child," he said to her.

Anita hastened to take advantage of the permission.

"What is the matter with Dona Anita?" the count asked with sympathy, as soon as she had gone.

"Vapours—headache—what do I know?" the haciendero replied. "All young girls are like that. In a few minutes she will have forgotten it."

"All the better. I confess to you that I was alarmed."

"But now that we are alone, would you not like me to give you an explanation of the enigma which appeared to interest you so much?"

"On the contrary, speak without any further delay; for, on my part, I have several important matters to impart to you."

CHAPTER III.

THE TWO HUNTERS.

About five miles from the town is the village of San José de Guaymas, commonly known as the *Rancho*.

This miserable *pueblo* is merely composed of a square of moderate side, intersected at right angles by two streets, bordered by tumbledown cabins, which are inhabited by Hiaqui Indians, &c., and all those nameless adventurers who have thronged to the shores of the Pacific since the discovery of the Californian plains.

The road from Guaymas to San José runs through a parched and sandy plain, on which only a few nopals and stunted cactuses grow, whose withered branches are covered with dust, and produce the effect of white phantoms at night.

The evening of the day on which our story commences, a horseman, wrapped to the eyes in a zarape, was following this road.

The sky, of a dark azure, was studded with glistening stars; the moon, which

had traversed one-third of her course, illumined the silent plain, and prolonged the all shadows of the trees on the naked earth.

The horseman, doubtless anxious to reach the end of a journey which was not without peril at this advanced hour, incessantly urged forward his horse.

He had all but crossed the uncultivated plains, and was just entering the woods which surround the Rancho, when his horse suddenly leaped on one side, and pricked up its ears in alarm. A sharp sound announced that the horseman had cocked his pistols.

"Fear nothing, caballero," a frank and sympathetic voice exclaimed; "but have the kindness to go a little farther to the right, if it makes no difference to you."

The stranger looked, and saw a man kneeling almost under his steed's feet, and holding in his hands the head of a horse.

"What on earth are you doing there?" he asked.

"You can see," the other replied sorrowfully. "I am bidding good-bye to my poor companion. A man must have lived a long time in the desert to appreciate the value of such a friend as he was."

"That is true," the stranger remarked, and immediately dismounting, added, "is he dead, then?"

"No, not yet; but he is as bad as if he were."

The stranger bent over the animal, whose body was agitated by a nervous quivering, opened its eyelids, and regarded it attentively.

"Your horse has had a stroke," he said a moment later. "Let me act."

"Oh!" the other exclaimed, "do you think you can save him?"

"I hope so," the first speaker laconically remarked.

"*Carai!* if you can do that, we shall be friends for life. Poor Negro! my old comrade!"

The horseman bathed the animal's temples and nostrils with rum and water. At the end of a few moments the horse appeared slightly recovered.

"Hold him tight," the improvised surgeon said.

"Be quiet then, my good beast. Come, Negro, my boy, *quieto, quieto;* it is for your good," he said soothingly.

The intelligent animal seemed to understand. It turned its head towards its master. The horseman, during this period, had been feeling in his girdle.

"Mind and hold him tightly," he again recommended.

"What are you going to do?"

"Bleed him."

"Yes, that is it. I knew it; but unfortunately I did not dare risk doing it myself."

The horse made a hasty move, caused by the coldness of the wound; but its master held it down and checked its struggles. At first the blood did not issue. At last a black drop appeared in the wound, then a second, speedily followed by a long jet of black and foaming blood.

"He is saved," the stranger said, as he wiped his lancet, and returned it to his fob.

"I will repay you this, on the word of Belhumeur!" the owner of the horse said. "You have rendered me one of those services which are never forgotten."

And, by an irresistible impulse, he held out his hand to the man who had so providentially crossed his path. The latter warmly returned the vigorous pressure. Henceforth all was arranged between them. These two men, who a few moments previously were ignorant of each other's existence, were friends.

The blood gradually lost its black tinge; it became vermilion, and flowed abundantly. The breathing of the panting steed had grown easy and regular. The

first stranger made a copious bleeding, and when he considered the horse in a fair way of recovery he stopped the effusion.

"And now," he said, "what do you propose doing?"

"My faith, I don't know."

"Where were you going when this accident occurred?"

"To the Rancho."

"I am going there. We are only a few yards off. You will get up behind me. We will lead your horse."

"I ask nothing better. You believe that my horse cannot carry me?"

"Perhaps he could do so, for he is a noble animal; but you would would run a risk of killing him."

"Yes; but I am afraid——"

"What of?" the other sharply interrupted him. "Are we not friends?"

"That is true. I accept."

The horse sprang up somewhat actively, and the two men who had met so strangely started at once, mounted on one horse. Twenty minutes later they reached the first buildings of the Rancho. At the entrance of the village the owner of the horse stopped.

"Where will you get down?"

"That is all the same to me; let us go first where you are going."

"Ah!" the horseman said, scratching his head, "the fact is, I am going nowhere in particular."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh! you will understand me in two words. I landed to-day at Guaymas; the Rancho is only the first station of a journey I medidate in the desert."

By the moonlight, a ray of which now played on the stranger's face, his companion attentively regarded his noble and pensive countenance.

"So that," he at length said, "any lodging will suit you?"

"A night is soon spent."

"Well, if you will permit me to act in my turn as guide, you shall have that within ten minutes."

"Agreed."

"I do not promise you a palace, but will take you to a *pulqueria.* You will find the society rather mixed; but what would you have? and, as you said yourself, a night is soon spent."

"In Heaven's name, then, proceed."

Then, passing his arm through that of his comrade, the new guide seized the horse's reins, and steered to a house standing about two-thirds of the way down the street where they were, whose badly-fitting windows gleamed in the night like the stoke-holes of a furnace, while cries, laughter, songs, and the shrill sound of the *jarabès*, indicated that, if the rest of the *pueblo* were plunged in sleep, there, at least, the people were awake.

"Have you quite made up your mind," the first said.

"Perfectly," the other answered.

The guide then rapped furiously at the worm-eaten door. It was long ere any one answered. At length a hoarse voice shouted from inside.

"*Quien vive?*"

"*Gente de paz,*" the stranger replied.

"Hum!" the voice went on, "that is not a name. What sort of weather is it?"

"One for all—all for one. The *cormuel* is strong enough to blow the horns off the oxen on the top of the Cierro del Herfuano."

The door was immediately opened, and the strangers entered. The companion

of the first horseman was well known in this den; for the master of the house and several other persons eagerly collected round him.

"Caballeros," he said, pointing to the person who followed him, "this senor is my friend, and I must request your kindness for him."

"He shall be treated like yourself, Belhumeur," the host replied. "Your horses have been led to the corral, where a truss of alfalfa has been put before them. As for yourselves, the house belongs to you."

During this exchange of compliments the strangers had contrived to find their way through the crowd. They crossed the room, and sat down in a corner before a table on which the host himself placed pulque, mezcal, chinguirito, Catalonian refino, and sherry.

"*Caramba*, Senor Huesped!" Belhumeur said with a laugh, "you are generous to-day."

"Do you not see that I have an angelito?" the other answered gravely.

"What, your son Pedrito——?"

"Is dead. I am trying to give my friends a cordial welcome, in order the better to feast the entrance into heaven of my poor boy."

"That's very proper," Belhumeur said, hobnobbing with the rather stoical parent.

The latter emptied his glass of refino at a draught, and withdrew. The strangers, by this time accustomed to the atmosphere in which they found themselves, began to look around them.

In the centre some ten individuals, with faces enough to hang them, covered with rags, and armed to the teeth, were furiously playing at montè. It was a strange fact, but one which did not appear to astonish any of the honourable gamblers, that a long dagger was stuck in the table to the right of the banker, and two pistols lay on his left. A few steps further on, men and women, more than half intoxicated, were dancing and singing. In a corner of the room thirty people were assembled round a table, on which a child, four years of age at the most, was seated in a wicker chair. This child presided over the meeting. He was dressed in his best clothes, had a crown of flowers on his head, and a profusion of nosegays was piled up on the table.

But alas! the child's brow was pale, his eyes glassy, his complexion leaden, and marked with violet spots. His body had the peculiar stiffness of a corpse. He was dead. He was the angelito.

Men, women, and children were reminding the poor mother, who made heroic efforts not to burst into tears, of the precocious intelligence, goodness, and prettiness of the little creature she had just lost.

"All this is hideous," the first traveller muttered.

"Is it not so?" the other assented. "Let us not notice it, but isolate ourselves amid these scoundrels, who have already forgotten our presence, and talk."

"Willingly, but unhappily we have nothing to say to each other."

"Perhaps we have. In the first place, we might let each other know who we are."

"That is true."

"You agree with me? Then I will give you the example of confidence and frankness."

"Good. After that my turn will come."

"As you already know, my dear mate," he began, "my name is Belhumeur. I am a Canadian; that is to say, almost a Frenchman. Circumstances too long to narrate at present, but which I will tell you some day, brought me, when a lad, into this country. Twenty years of my life have passed in traversing the desert in every direction: there is not a stream or a by-path which I do not know. I am still

a young man, hardly forty-five years of age. An old friend of mine, an Indian chief of the name of Eagle-head, proposed to me to accompany him on an excursion he wished to make in Apacheria. I allowed myself to be tempted; said good-bye to those I love, and who tried in vain to hold me back; and free from all ties, without regret for the past, happy in the present, and careless of the future, I went gaily ahead, bearing with me those inestimable treasures of the hunter, a strong heart, a gay character, excellent arms, and a horse accustomed, like his master, to good fortune and ill; and so here I am. And now, mate, you know me as well as if we had been friends for the last ten years."

The other had listened attentively to this story, fixing a thoughtful glance on the bold adventurer.

When Belhumeur was silent, he remained for some moments without replying, doubtlessly plunged in profound and earnest reflections; then, offering him across the table a white, elegant, and delicate hand, he replied with great emotion, and in the best French ever spoken in these distant regions,—

"I thank you, Belhumeur, for the confidence you have placed in me. My history is not longer, but more mournful than yours. You shall have it in a few words."

"Eh?" the Canadian exelaimed. "Do you happen to be a Frenchman?"

"Yes, I have that honour."

"By Jove! I ought to have suspected it," he burst out joyously. "Only to think that for an hour we have been stupidly talking bad Spanish, instead of employing our own tongue."

"You are right."

"Well, then, no more Spanish between us?"

"No, nothing but French."

"Bravo! Here's your health, my worthy fellow-countryman! And now," he added, returning his glass to the table after emptying it, "let us have your story."

"I told you that it was not long."

"No matter; go on ahead. I am certain 'twill interest me enormously."

"I, too, have lived the life of a wood-ranger," the Frenchman said; "I, too, have experienced the intoxicating charms of that feverish existence, full of moving incidents, no two of which are alike. Far from the country where we now are, I have traversed vast deserts, immense virgin forests, in which no man prior to myself had left the imprint of his step. Like you, a friend accompanied me in my adventurous travels, sustaining my courage, maintaining my gaiety by his inexhaustible humour and his unbounded courage. Alas! that was the happiest period of my life."

"I fell in love with a woman, and married her. So soon as my friend saw me rich and surrounded by a family he left me. His departure was my first grief—a grief from which I never recovered, which each day rendered more poignant, and which now tortures me like a remorse. Alas! where is now that strong heart, that devoted friend who ever interposed between danger and myself, who loved me like a brother, and for whom I felt a son's affection? He is probably dead!"

His head here sank in his hands, and he yielded to a flood of bitter thoughts which rose from his heart.

Belhumeur looked at him, and pressing his hand, said in a low and sympathising voice, "Courage, my friend."

"Yes," the Frenchman continued, "that was what he always said to me when, prostrated by grief, I felt hope failing me. 'Courage,' he would say to me in his rough voice, laying his hand on my shoulders; and I would feel galvanised by the touch, and draw myself up at the sound of that cherished voice, ready to recommence

the struggle, for I felt myself stronger. Several years passed in the midst of a felicity which nothing came to trouble. I had a wife I adored, charming children for whom I formed dreams of the future; in short, I wanted for nothing save my poor comrade, about whom I could discover nothing from the moment he left me, in spite of my constant inquiries. Now my happiness has faded away never to return. My wife, my children are dead—cruelly murdered in their sleep by Indians, who carried my hacienda by storm. I alone remained alive amid the smoking ruins of that abode where I had spent so many happy days. All I loved was eternally buried beneath the ashes. My heart was broken, and I did not wish to survive all that was dear to me; but a friend, the only one who remained to me, saved me. He carried me off by main force to his tribe, for he was an Indian. By his care and devotion he recalled me to life. He died only a few months back. Before closing his eyes for ever he made me swear to do all he asked of me. I promised him. 'Brother,' he said, 'every man must proceed in life toward a certain object. So soon as I am dead, go in search of that friend from whom you have so long been separated.' Two hours later the worthy chief died in my arms. So soon as his body was committed to the earth I set out. This very day, as I told you, I reached Guaymas. My intention is to bury myself immediately in the desert; for if my poor friend be still alive, I can only find him there."

There was a lengthened silence, at length broken by Belhumeur.

"Hum! all that is very sad, mate, I must allow," he said, tossing his head. "You are rushing upon a desperate enterprise. A man is a grain of sand lost in the desert. Who knows, even supposing he still lives, at what place he may be at this moment; and if, while you are seeking him on one side, he may not be on the other? I have a proposal to make—a useful one."

"I know it, my friend, before you tell it me. I thank you, and accept it," the Frenchman replied.

"It is agreed, then. We will start together. You will come with me into Apacheria?"

"Yes."

"By Jove! I am in luck. I have hardly separated from Loyal Heart ere Heaven brings me together with a friend as precious as he is."

"Who is that Loyal Heart you mention?"

"My old friend, and whom you shall know some day. But come, we will start at daybreak."

"Whenever you please."

"I have the meeting with Eagle-head two days' journey from here."

"What are you going to do in Apacheria?"

"I do not know. Eagle-head asked me to accompany him, and I am going. It is my rule never to ask my friends their secrets."

"Excellent reasoning, my dear Belhumeur; but, as we shall be together for a long time, I hope at least——"

"I, too."

"It is right," the Frenchman continued, "that you should know my name."

"That need not trouble you; for I could easily give you one if you had reasons for preserving your incognito."

"My name is Count Louis de Prébois Crancé."

Belhumeur rose as if moved by a spring.

"Pardon me, sir count, for the free manner in which I have addressed you. Had I known in whose company I had the honour of being, I should certainly not have taken so great a liberty."

"Belhumeur, Belhumeur," the count said with a mournful smile, and seizing his hand quickly, "is our friendship to commence in that way? There are here

only two men ready to share the same life, run the same dangers, and confront the same foes. I only wish to be to you Louis, your good comrade, your devoted friend, in the same way as you are to me only Belhumeur, the wood-ranger."

The Canadian's face shone with pleasure at these words.

"Well spoken," he said gaily, "well spoken, on my soul! I am but a poor ignorant hunter; and, by my faith, why should I conceal it? What you have just said to me has gone straight to my heart. I am yours, Louis, for life and death."

"I am convinced of it; but we understand each other now, do we not?"

"By Jove——!"

At this moment there was such a tremendous disturbance in the street, that it drowned that in the room. As always happens under such circumstances, the adventurers assembled in the *pulqueria* were silent of a common accord, in order to listen. Shouts, the clashing of sabres, the stamping of horses, drowned at intervals by the discharge of firearms, could be clearly distinguished.

"*Carai!*" Belhumeur exclaimed, "there's fighting going on in the street."

"I am afraid so," the pulquero laconically answered.

Suddenly blows from sabre hilts and pistol buts resounded vigorously, and a powerful voice shouted angrily,—

"Open, in the devil's name, or I'll smash in your miserable door!"

CHAPTER IV.

COUNT MAXIME GAETAN DE LHORAILLES.

BEFORE explaining the cause of the infernal noise which suddenly rose to disturb the tranquillity of the *pulqueria*, we are obliged to go back a little.

About three years before the period in which our story opens, on a cold and rainy December night, eight men, whose costumes and manners showed them to belong the highest Parisian society, were assembled in an elegant private room of the Café Anglais.

The night was far advanced; the wax candles dispersed a mournful light; the rain lashed the windows, and the wind howled lugubriously. The guests, seated round the table and the relics of a splendid supper, seemed to be infected by the gloomy melancholy that brooded over nature, and, lying back on their chairs, some slept, while others, lost in thought, paid no attention to what was going on around them.

The clock on the mantel-piece slowly struck three, and the last sound had scarcely died away ere the repeated clacking of a postilion's whip could be heard.

The door opened and a waiter came in.

"The post-chaise the Count de Lhorailles ordered is waiting," he said.

"Thanks," one of the guests said.

The latter went out, and closed the door after him. The few words he had uttered had broken the charm which enchained the guests; all sat up, as if aroused from sleep suddenly; and, turning to a young man of about thirty, they said:

"It is really true that you are going?"

"I am," he answered, with a nod of affirmation.

"Where to, though?"

The gentleman to whom the remark was addressed smiled sorrowfully.

The Count de Lhorailles was a handsome man, with expressive features, energetic glance, and disdainful lip; he belonged to the most ancient nobility, and his reputation was perfectly established among the "lions" of the day.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I can perfectly well understand that my conduct appears to you strange. You have a right to an explanation from me, and I am most desirous to give it you. It was, indeed, for that purpose that I invited you to the last supper we shall enjoy together. To-morrow I shall be far from Paris, and within a week I shall have left France never to return.

"Do not be impatient, gentlemen," he said; "the story I have to tell you is not long.

"I am completely ruined. I have only a small sum of money left, on which I should starve in Paris, and end in a month by blowing out my brains—a gloomy perspective which possesses no attractions for me, I assure you. For the reasons I have had the honour of imparting to you, and an infinity of others it is needless for you to know, and which I am convinced would interest you very slightly, France has become odious to me. So now a parting glass of champagne, and good-bye to all."

"A moment," a guest remarked. "You have not told us to what country you intend to go?"

"To America. I am allowed to possess a certain amount of courage and intelligence, and therefore am going to a country where those two qualities are sufficient to make the fortune of their possessor. Have you any more questions to ask me, baron?"

The latter remained for some moments plunged in serious reflections; at length he raised his head, and fixed a cold and searching glance on the count.

"You really mean to go, my friend?" he said.

"On my honour."

"And you are really resolved to make for yourself, in America, a position.

"Yes," he said, sharply, "by all the means possible."

"That is good. In your turn listen to me, count, and if you will profit by what I am about to reveal to you, you may succeed in accomplishing the wild projects you have formed."

The Baron de Spurtzheim was a man of about five-and-forty. The only thing known about the baron was his colossal fortune, which he spent royally. As for his antecedents every one was ignorant of them, although he was received in the first society. It was merely remarked vaguely that he had been a great traveller, and had resided for several years in America.

The baron was more intimately connected with the count than with his other companions. He seemed to feel a certain degree of interest in him.

"Speak, but be brief, my dear baron," the count said. "You know that the chaise is waiting for me."

Without replying, the baron rang the bell. The waiter came in.

"Dismiss the postilion, and tell him to return at five o'clock. You can go."

The count, more and more amazed at his friend's strange conduct, did not make the least observation.

"And now, gentlemen," the baron said in his sarcastic and incisive voice, "as our friend de Lhorailles has told us his history, and we are becoming confidential, why should not I tell you mine? The weather is fearful—it is raining torrents. Here we are comfortably tiled in: we have champagne and regalias—two excellent things when not abused. Listen to me, then, for I believe what I have to tell you will interest you the more, because some among you will not be vexed to know the whole truth about me."

The guests burst into a laugh at this remark. When their hilarity was over the baron began:

"As for the first part of my story, I shall imitate the count's brevity. My ancestors in the middle ages were, to a certain extent, freebooters. True blood always shows itself. When my last resources were nearly exhausted, my instincts were aroused, and my eyes fixed on America. In less than ten years I amassed there the colossal fortune which I now have the honour of spending in your honourable company.

"But," the count exclaimed, impatiently, "how did you amass this colossal fortune, as you yourself term it?"

"About a million and a half," the baron coolly remarked.

A shudder of covetousness ran through the party.

"A colossal fortune, indeed," the count continued; "but I repeat, how did you acquire it?"

"If I had not intended to reveal it to you, my dear fellow, you may be sure I would not have abused your patience."

"We are listening," the guests shouted.

"In the first place, let us drink a glass of champagne to our friend's success," said the baron.

The glasses were filled and emptied again in a twinkling, so great was the curiosity of the auditors. After putting down his glass before him the baron lighted a regalia, and, turning to the count, said to him;

"I am now addressing myself more particularly to you. You are young, enterprising, gifted with an iron constitution and an energetic will. I am convinced that, if death does not thwart your plans, you will succeed. The sole deity of America is gold. To acquire gold the American is capable of everything; but not, as in old Europe, under the cloak of honesty, and by a roundabout process, but frankly, openly, without shame, and without remorse. This laid down, your line of conduct is ready traced. There is no project, however extravagant it may appear, which in that country does not offer chances of success; for the means of execution are immense, and almost impossible of control. The American is the man who has best comprehended the strength of association. On arriving there alone, without friends or acquaintances, however intelligent and determined you may be, you will be lost, because you find yourself alone."

"That is true," the count muttered with conviction.

"Patience!" the baron replied, with a smile. "Do you think I intend to send you into action without a cuirass? No, no, I will give you one."

All those present looked with amazement on this man, who had grown enormously in their esteem in a few moments.

"Remember what I am about to tell you; it is of the utmost importance for you not to forget a word, my friend: from that positively depends the success of your trip to the New World."

"Speak—I am not losing a syllable!"

'When strangers began to flock to America, a company of bold fellows was formed, without faith or law, without pity as without weakness, who, denying all nationality, as they issued from every people, only recognised one government, that

which they themselves instituted on Tortoise Island, a desolate rock, lost in the middle of the mighty ocean—a monstrous government: for violence was its basis, and it only admitted of right being might. These bold companions, attached to each other by a Draconian charter, assumed the name of the Brethren of the Coast, and were divided into two classes—the Buccaneers and the Filibusters.

"The buccaneers, wandering through the primeval forests, hunted oxen, while the filibusters scoured the seas, attacking every flag, plundering every vessel under the pretext of making war on the Spaniards, but in reality stripping the rich for the benefit of the poor. The Brethren of the Coast, continually recruited from all the rogues of the Old World, became powerful. At last, through the very force of circumstances, like all powers which are the offspring of anarchy, and consequently possess no inherent vitality, when the maritime nations recognised their own strength, the Brethren of the Coast grew gradually weaker, and finally disappeared entirely. It was supposed that they were annihilated; but it was not so, as you shall now see. I ask your pardon for this long and tedious prologue."

"It is nearly half-past four," the count observed; "we have not more than forty minutes left us."

"That period, though so short, will be sufficient," the baron answered. "I resume my narrative. The Brethren of the Coast were not destroyed, but transformed. The Brethren of the Coast were converted into *Dauph'yeers*. Instead of boldly boarding the enemies' ships, sword and hatchet in hand, as they formerly did, they became insignificant, and dug mines. At the present day the Dauph'yeers are the masters and kings of the New World; they are nowhere and everywhere, but they reign. Their power is immense, the more so because it is secret, ignored. For a secret society to be denied existence is a real power. There is not a revolution in America in which the influence of the Dauph'yeers does not step forward valorously, either to insure its triumph or to crush it. They can do everything—they are everything: without their circle nothing is possible."

There was a lengthened silence: each was reflecting on what he had just heard.

The distant sound of a rapidly approaching vehicle recalled the count to the gravity of the situation.

"Here is my chaise," he said. "I am about to set out, and I know nothing."

"Patience!" the baron replied. "Take leave of your friends, and we will start."

Yielding, in spite of himself, to the influence of this singular man, the count obeyed, without dreaming of offering the slightest opposition. He rose, embraced his old friends, and left the room, followed by the baron.

The post-chaise was waiting in front of the house. The young men had opened the windows, and were waving fresh adieux to their friend. The count turned a long look on the Boulevard.

"Farewell," said the count, in a stifled voice, "farewell!"

"Courage!" a stern voice whispered in his ear.

The young man shuddered: the baron was at his side.

"Come, my friend," he said, as he helped him to enter the carriage, "I will accompany you to the barrier."

The count got in and fell back on a cushion.

"The Normandy Road," the baron shouted.

The driver cracked his whip, and the chaise started at a gallop.

"Good-bye! good-bye!" the young men shouted as they leant out of the windows of the Café Anglais.

For a long time the two men remained silent.

"Gaëtan!" said the baron.

"What would you!" the latter replied.

"I have not yet finished my narrative."

"It is true. Pardon me, my dear fellow."

"I pardon you, but on condition that you listen to me."

"I promise it."

"My friend, if you desire success, the friendship and protection of those Dauph'yeers I mentioned are indispensable for you."

"How can I obtain them—I, a wretched stranger? I see the extravagance of my projects, and hope abandons me."

"Already?" the baron exclaimed, sternly. "Child without energy, I will give you the means, if you like, of obtaining the friendship and protection so necessary for you."

"You!" the count said, quivering with excitement.

"Yes, I! Do you fancy that I have been amusing myself with torturing your mind for the last two hours. No, Gaëtan. If you had that thought you were wrong, for I am fond of you. When you this night frankly avowed to us your position, and explained your plans, I found myself again in you; my heart beat; for a moment I was happy; and then I vowed to open to you that path so wide, so great and so noble."

"Oh!" the count said, energetically, "I may succumb in the contest which begins this day between myself and humanity at large, but I will fall nobly and like a man of courage."

"I am persuaded of it, my friend. I have only a few more words to say to you. I, too, was a Dauph'yeer, and am so still. Thanks to my brethren, I gained the fortune I now possess. Take this portfolio; put round your neck this chain, from which a medallion hangs; then, when you are alone, read the instructions contained in the portfolio, and act as they prescribe. That is the present I reserved for you, and which I would not give you till we were alone."

"O heavens!" the count said, with effusion.

"Here we are at the barrier." the baron remarked, as he stopped the carriage. "It is time for us to separate. Farewell, my friend! Courage and good will! Embrace me."

The two men remained for a long time in each other's arms. At length the baron freed himself by a vigorous effort, opened the door, and leaped out on the pavement.

"Farewell!" he cried for the last time; "farewell, Gaëtan! Remember me."

CHAPTER V.

THE DAUPH'YEERS.

Now let us quit the old world, and transport ourselves to the new one at a single leap.

There is in America a city which possibly cannot be compared to any other in the whole world. That city is Valparaiso.

Valparaiso! The word resounds in the enchanted ear like the gentle and soft notes of a love song.

A coquettish, smiling, and mad city, softly reclining, like a careless Creole, round a delicious bay, at the foot of three majestic mountains, lazily bathing her rosy and dainty feet in the azure waves of the Pacific, and veiling her dreamy brow in the storm-laden clouds which escape from Cape Horn, and roll with a sinister sound round the peaks of the Cordilleras, to form a splendid glory for them.

Although built on the Chilian coast, this strange city belongs, in fact, to no country, and recognises no nationality ; or, to speak more correctly, it admits all into its bosom.

Valparaiso, like nearly all the commercial centres of South America, is a pile of shapeless dens and magnificent palaces jostling each other, and hanging in abrupt clusters on the abrupt flanks of the three mountains.

At the period the event occurred which we are about to describe, the streets were narrow, dirty, deprived of air and sun. The paving, being perfectly ignored, rendered them perfect morasses, in which the wayfarer sank to the knee when the winter's rains had loosened the soil.

Deleterious exhalations incessantly escaped from these mud holes, heightened by the filth of every description which the daily cleaning of the inhabitants accumulated.

At the present day, we are told, this state of things has been altered, and Valparaiso no longer resembles itself. We should like to believe it.

In one of the dirtiest and worst-famed streets of Valparaiso was a house, which we will describe.

We are compelled, at the outset, to confess that if the architect intrusted with its construction had shown himself more than sober in the distribution of the ornaments, he had built it perfectly to suit the trade of the various tenants destined in future to occupy it.

It was a clay-built hovel. The *facade* looked upon the Street de la Merced.

This house was inhabited by an innkeeper. Contrary to European buildings, which grow smaller the higher they rise from the ground, this house grew larger ; so that the upper part was lofty and well-lighted, while the shop and other ground-floor rooms were gloomy.

The present occupier had skilfully profited by this architectural arrangement to have a room made in the wall between the first and second floors, which was reached by a turning concealed staircase.

This room was so built that the slightest noise in the street distinctly reached the ears of persons in it.

The worthy landlord, occupier of this house, had naturally a rather mixed custom of people of every description—smugglers, *rateros*, rogues, and others ; consequently a whale-boat constantly fastened to a ring under a window opening on the sea, offered a provisional but secure shelter to the customers of the establishment whenever the agents of government evinced a desire to pay a domiciliary visit to this den.

This house was known by the name of the *Locanda del Sol.*

On an iron plate suspended from a beam, and creaking with every breath of wind, there had been painted by a native artist a huge red face, surrounded by orange beams.

Senor Benito Sarzuela, master of the Locanda del Sol, was a tall, dry fellow, with an angular face and crafty look—a mixture of the Araucano, Negro, and Spaniard, whose *morale* responded perfectly to his *physique* ; that is to say, he combined in himself the vices of the three races to which he belonged—red, black, and white—without possessing one single virtue.

Some two months after the events we described in a previous chapter, about eleven of the clock on a cold and misty night, Senor Benito Sarzuela was seated in melancholy mood within his deserted bar.

The wind blowing violently, caused the sign of the *meson* to creak on its hinges with gloomy complaints, and the heavy black clouds coming from the south moved weightily athwart the sky, dropping at intervals heavy masses of rain.

"Come," the unhappy host muttered to himself, "there is another day which finishes as badly as the others. *Sangre de Dios!* for the last week I have had no luck."

In fact, through a singular accident, for about a month the Locanda del Sol had been completely shorn of its old brilliancy.

After the few words we have heard him utter, the worthy Don Benito rose carelessly, and prepared, with many an oath, to close his establishment, so as at any rate to save in candles, when suddenly an individual entered, then two, then three, then six, then ten, and at last such a number that the locandero gave up all attempts at counting them.

These men were all wrapped up in large cloaks; their heads were covered by felt hats, whose broad brims, pulled down carefully over their eyes, rendered them perfectly unrecognisable.

The room was soon crowded with customers, drinking and smoking, but not uttering a word.

The extraordinary thing was that, although all the tables were lined, such a religious silence prevailed among these strange bibbers that the noise of the rain pattering outside could be distincly heard.

The host, agreeably surprised by this sudden turn of fortune, had joyfully set to work serving his unexpected customers; but all at once a singular thing happened, which Senor Sarzuela was far from anticipating.

At the first stroke of eleven more than two hundred customers occupied the Locanda del Sol.

The locandero, with that craft which was one of the most salient points of his character, then comprehended that something extraordinary was about to happen.

At the thought a tremor seized upon him, his hair began to stand on end, and he sought for means to get rid of these sinister and silent guests.

In his despair he rose with an air which he thought to render most resolute, and walked to the door as if for the purpose of closing his establishment. The customers still as silent as fish, did not make a sign of moving.

Don Benito felt his nervousness redoubled.

Suddenly the voice of a sereno rising in the distance furnished him with the pretext he vainly sought, by shouting as he passed the locanda—

"*Ave Maria purissima! Las onze han dado y lluve.*"

Although accompanied by modulations capable of making a dog weep, the sacramental cry of the sereno absolutely produced no impression on mine host's customers.

"Senores caballeros, it is eleven o'clock," he said. "The police regulations forbid me keeping open longer. Have the goodness, I beg you, to withdraw without delay."

This harangue, from which he promised himself the greatest success, produced an effect exactly contrary to what he expected. The strangers vigorously smote the table with their glasses, shouting unanimously—

"Drink!"

The landlord bounded back.

"Still, caballeros," he ventured to remark, "the police regulations are severe. It is eleven, and——"

He could say no more; the noise recommenced with even greater intensity, and the customers shouted together, in a voice of thunder, "Drink!"

A reaction, easy to comprehend, then took place in the mind of mine host.

"Ah," he shouted in feverish exasperation, "that is the game! Well, we will see if I am master in my own house. I will go and fetch the alcade."

This threat of justice from the mouth of the worthy Sarzuela appeared so droll, that the customers broke out, with a unanimity which did them all credit, into a burst of Homeric laughter right under the poor fellow's nose. This was the *coup de grace.* The host's anger was converted into raving madness, and he rushed head foremost at the door. But he had hardly crossed the threshold of his house ere a new arrival seized him unceremoniously by the arm, and hurled him back roughly into the room.

"What fly has stung you, my dear landlord? Are you mad to go out bare-headed in such weather?"

And then, while the locandero, terrified and confounded by this rude shock, tried to regain his balance and re-establish a little order in his ideas, the unknown, as coolly as if he were at home, had, with the help of some of the customers, to whom he made signs, shut the shutters and bolted the door with as much care as Sarzuela himself usually devoted to this delicate operation.

"There, now that is done," the stranger said, turning to the amazed host, "suppose we have a chat, *compadre?* Ah! I suppose you do not recognise me?" he added, as he removed his hat, and displayed a fine intelligent face.

"Oh, *el Senor Don Gaetano!*" said Sarzuela.

"Silence!" the other said. "Come hither."

He drew the landlord into a corner of the room, and said in a low voice—

"Are there any strangers in your house?"

"Look!" he said with a piteous glance, "that legion of demons invaded my house an hour back. They drink well, it is true; but there is something suspicious about them."

"The more reason that you should have nothing to fear. Besides, I am not alluding to them. I ask you if you have any strange lodgers?"

"From top to bottom of my house I have no other persons than these caballeros. As ever since they have been here, thanks to the way in which they are muffled, it has been impossible for me to see the tip of a nose I was utterly unable to recognise them."

"You are a donkey, my good friend. These men who bother you so greatly are all Dauph'yeers."

"Really!" the amazed host exclaimed, "then why do they hide their faces?"

"My faith, Master Sarzuela, I fancy it is probably because they do not wish to have them seen."

And laughing at the landlord, who was sadly out of countenance, the stranger made a sign. Two men rose, rushed on the poor fellow, and before he could even guess what they intended, he found himself magnificently garotted.

"Fear nothing, Master Sarzuela; no harm will befall you," the stranger continued "We only want to talk without witnesses, and as you are naturally a chatterer, we take our precautions, that is all. Gag him, lay him on his bed, and turn the key in his door."

The stranger's orders were punctually executed: the luckless Sarzuela, tied and gagged, was carried from the room on the shoulders of two of his assailants, borne upstairs, thrown on his bed, and locked in in a twinkling.

The Dauph'yeers, so soon as they found themselves masters of the hostelry, ranged the tables one on the other against the walls, so as to clear the centre of the room, and drew up the benches in a line, on which they then seated themselves.

The Locanda del Sol, owing to the changes it underwent, was metamorphosed into a club.

The last arrival, the man who had given the order to gag the host, took off his cloak, made a sign commanding silence, and speaking in excellent French, said in a clear and sonorous voice—

"Brethren, thanks for your punctuality."

The Dauph'yeers politely returned his salute.

"Gentlemen," he continued, "our projects are advancing. Soon, I hope, we shall attain the object to which we have so long been tending, and quit that obscurity in which we are languishing, to conquer our place in the sunshine. America is a marvellous land. I have taken all the necessary measures, as I pledged myself to you to do a fortnight ago. We have succeeded. You were kind enough to appoint me director of the Mexican movement, and I thank you for it, gentlemen. A concession of three thousand acres of land has been made me at Guetzalli, in Upper Sonora. The first step has been taken. My lieutenant, De Laville, started yesterday for Mexico, to take possession of the granted territory. I have to-day another request to make of you. You who listen to me here are all Europeans or North Americans, and you will understand me. I need one hundred and fifty devoted men. The enterprise I meditate, and in which I shall possibly perish, is entirely in the interest of the association. If I succeed, every man who took part in it will have a large reward and splendid position insured him. You know the man who introduced me to you, and he had gained your entire confidence. The medal he gave me, and which I now show you, proves to you that he entirely responds for me. Will you, in your turn, trust in me as he has done?"

He was silent. His auditors began a long discussion among themselves. At length a man rose.

"Count Gaëtan de Lhorailles," he said, "my brethren have requested me to answer you in their name. You presented yourself to us, supported by the recommendation of a man in whom we have the most entire confidence. Your conduct has appeared to confirm this recommendation. The one hundred and fifty men you ask for are ready to follow you, no matter whither you may lead them, persuaded as they are that they can only gain by seconding your plans. I, Diégo Léon, inscribe myself at the head of the list."

The Dauph'yeers shouted, outvying each other. The count gave a signal, and the silence was re-established.

"Brothers, I thank you," he said. "The nucleus of our association will remain at Valparaiso, and if I need them I will draw from that city the resolute men I may presently want. For the moment one hundred and fifty men are sufficient for me."

"Captain de Lhorailles," Diégo Léon replied, "you say that you have only need of one hundred and fifty men. Draw them by lots, then."

"Thank you once again, my brave comrades. Believe me, each shall have his turn. The project I have formed is grand and worthy of you. Selection would only arouse jealousy among men all equally worthy. Diégo Léon, I intrust to you the duty of drawing lots."

"It shall be done," said Léon, a Bearnese.

"And now, my friends," one last word. Remember that in three months I shall expect you at Guetzalli. Drink, brothers, drink to the success of our enterprise!"

"Let us drink!" all the Brethren of the Coast shouted, quite electrified.

The wine and brandy then began flowing. The whole night was spent in an orgie, whose proportions became, towards morning, gigantic. The Count de Lhorailles—thanks to the talisman the baron gave him on parting—had found

himself immediately on his arrival in America, at the head of resolute and unscrupulous men.

Two months after the meeting to which we have introduced the reader, the count and his one hundred and fifty Dauph'yeers were assembled at the colony of Guetzalli—that magnificent concession which M. de Lhorailles had obtained through his occulent influences.

The count had created a circle of devoted friends and useful acquaintances, who on various occasions pleaded in his behalf and supported him by their credit.

He was about to gain an honourable rank in society by marrying the daughter of Don Sylva de Torrès, one of the richest hacienderos in Sonora; and through the influence of his future father-in-law he had just received a commission as captain of a free corps.

We will now return to the house of Don Sylva de Torrès.

CHAPTER VI.

BY THE WINDOW.

When the young lady left the sitting-room to retire to her sleeping apartment the count, turning to Don Sylva, said—

"Let us talk about business matters. Are you agreeable?"

"Have you anything interesting to tell me?"

"You shall be the judge. Listen. Thanks to certain letters of which I was the bearer, and, above all, your kind recommendation, General Marcos received me in the most charming manner. In short, he gave me *carte blanche*, authorising me to raise, not merely one hundred and fifty men, but double the number."

"Oh! that is magnificent."

"Is it not? He told me also that in a war like that I was about to undertake—for my chase of the Apaches is a real war—he left me at liberty to act as I pleased.

"Come, I am delighted with the result. And now, what are your intentions?"

"I have resolved on quitting you to proceed, in the first place, to Guetzalli, whence I have now been absent nearly three weeks. I want to revisit my colony, in order to see if all goes on as I would wish. On the other hand, I shall not be sorry, before departing, to protect my colonists from a *coup de main*, by throwing up round the establishment earth-works strong enough to repulse an assault of the savages. This is the more important, because Guetzalli must always remain my head quarters."

"All right; and you start?"

"This very evening. You are aware how time presses at present."

"It is true. Have you nothing more to say to me?"

"Pardon me, I have one other point which I expressly reserved for the last."

"Oh, oh! I am listening to you, then, my friend. Speak quickly."

"On my arrival in this country, at a period when the enterprises I have since successfully carried out were only in embryo, you were good enough, Don Sylva, to place at my disposal not only your credit, which is immense, but your riches, which are incalculable."

"It is true," the Mexican said with a smile.

"I availed myself largely of your offers. Permit me now to settle with you the only part of the debt I can discharge. Here," he added, taking a paper from his portfolio, "is a bill for 100,000 piastres, payable at sight on Walter Blount and Co., bankers of Mexico. I am happy, believe me, Don Sylva, to be able to pay this debt."

"Pardon me," the haciendero quickly interrupted him, "we no longer understand each other."

"How so?"

"On your arrival at Guaymas, you presented yourself to me, bearer of a pressing letter of recommendation from a man to whom I owe very great obligations. The Baron de Spurtzheim described you to me rather as a beloved son than as a friend in whom he took interest. When I knew you, and could appreciate all that was noble and grand in your character, our relations became closer and more intimate. I offered you my daughter's hand, which you accepted."

"And gladly so," the count explained.

"Very good," the haciendero continued with a smile. "The money I could receive from a stranger belongs to my son-in-law. Tear up that paper."

"Ah!" the count said, "that was exactly what troubled me. I am not your son-in-law yet? I fear I never shall be."

"What can make you fancy that? Have you not my promise? The word of Don Sylva de Torrès is a pledge which no one has ever dared to doubt."

"And for that reason I have no such idea. It is not you I am afraid of, but Dona Anita."

"Oh, oh! my friend, you must explain yourself, for I confess I do not understand you at all," Don Sylva said sharply.

"Good gracious, my friend, I am quite in despair at having produced this discussion! I love Dona Anita. Love, as you know, easily takes umbrage. Although my betrothed has ever been amiable, still I confess that I fancy she does not love me."

"You are mad, Don Gaëtan. Young girls know not what they like or dislike. Do not trouble yourself about such childish things. I promised that she shall be your wife, and it shall be so."

"Still, if she loved another, I should not like——"

"What! Really what you say has not common sense. Anita loves no one but you, I am sure. You say that you start for Guetzalli this evening?"

"Yes."

"Very good. Prepare apartments for my daughter and myself."

"Is it possible?" the count said joyfully.

"To-morrow at daybreak we will start; so make haste."

"I am the happiest of mortals."

"All the better."

The two men exchanged a few words further, and separated with renewed promises of meeting again soon.

Don Sylva, accustomed to command despotically, and to allow no one to discuss his will, told his daughter, through a waiting-maid, that she must prepare for a rather long journey the next morning.

The news was a thunderbolt for the young lady. She sank half fainting into an easy chair. It was evident to her that this journey was only a pretext to separate her from the man she loved. The poor child remained thus for several hours, a prey to violent despair, and not dreaming of seeking impossible repose; for, in the state in which she found herself, she knew that sleep would not close her eyes, all swollen with tears, and red with fever.

Gradually the sounds of the town died away one after the other. All slept or seemed to sleep. Don Sylva's house was plunged into complete darkness.

At this moment two hesitating shadows were cast on the wall opposite the haciendero's house. Two men, wrapped in long cloaks, stopped and examined the dimly-lighted window with that attention only found in thieves and lovers.

"Hum!" the first said in a sharp and suppressed voice, "you are certain of what you assert, Cucharès?"

"As of my eternal salvation, Senor Don Martial," the scamp replied. "The accursed Englishman entered the house while I was there.

We may here remark that a few years ago, and possibly even now, in the eyes of the Mexicans all foreigners were English, and consequently heretics. Hence they naturally ranked, though little suspecting it, with the men whom it is no crime to kill, but whose assassination is rather looked upon as a meritorious action.

Don Martial continued—

"On the faith of the Tigrero, this man has twice crossed my path, and I have spared him; but let him be careful against the third meeting."

"Oh!" Cucharès said, "the reverend Fray Becchico says that a man gains splendid indulgences by 'cutting' an Englishman. I am much inclined to indulge myself with this one; it would be so much gained."

"On thy life, picaro, let him alone."

"Well, we'll not mention it again," he replied; "I will leave it to you. The nina detests him."

"Have you any proof of what you say?"

"What better proof than the repugnance she displays as soon as he appears?"

"Ah! I would give a thousand ounces to know what to believe."

"What prevents you? Everybody is asleep—no one will see you. I am certain that Dona Anita would be delighted to have a chat."

"Oh, if I could but believe it!" he muttered.

"Who knows?" perhaps she is expecting you."

"Silence, you scoundrel!"

"By'r Lady, only listen! If what is said be true, the poor child must be in a perplexity, if not worse."

"What do they say? Come, speak, but be brief."

"A very simple thing—that Dona Anita de Torrès marries within a week the Englishman, Don Gaëtan."

"You lie, villain!" the Tigrero said. "I know not what prevents me thrusting down your throat with my dagger the odious words."

"You would do wrong," the other said. "I am only an echo that repeats what it hears, nothing more."

"That is true; but what is to be done?"

"*Carai!* follow the advice I give you."

The Tigrero turned another long glance on the window, and let his head sink with an irresolute air.

"What will she say on seeing me?" he muttered.

"*Caramba!*" the lepero said in a sarcastic tone, "she will cry, 'You are welcome, *alma mia!*' It is clear, *carai!* Opportunity has only three hairs, in love as in war. You must seize her when she presents herself: if you do not, you run a risk of never meeting her again.

The Mexican approached the lepero near enough to touch him, and, fixing his glance on his tiger-cat eyes, said in a low and concentrated voice—

"Cuchar s, I trust in you; but were you to deceive my confidence I would kill you like a coyote."

The Tigrero pronounced these words with such an accent of dull fury, that the lepero, who knew the man before whom he was standing, turned pale.

"I am devoted to you, Don Martial," he replied. "Whatever may happen, count on me. What must I do?"

"Nothing; but wait, watch, and at the least suspicious sound, warn me."

"Count on me. Go to work. I am deaf and dumb, and during your absence, I will watch over you."

"Good!" the Tigrero said.

He drew a few steps nearer, undid the reata fastened round his loins, and held it in his right hand. Then he raised his eyes, measured the distance, and turning the reata forcibly round his head, hurled it into Dona Anita's balcony. The running knot caught in an iron hook, and remained firmly attached.

"Remember!" the Tigrero said.

"Go on," the latter said, as he leaned against the wall and crossed his legs: "I answer for everything."

Don Martial was satisfied, or feigned to be satisfied, with this assurance. He seized the reata, and taking a leap, he raised himself by the strength of his wrists, and speedily reached the balcony. He climbed over and went up to the window.

Dona Anita was asleep, half reclining in an easy chair. The poor girl, pale and exhausted, her eyes swollen with tears, had been conquered by sleep, which never gives up its claim on young and vigorous constitutions. On her marbled cheeks the tears had traced a long furrow, which was still humid. Don Martial surveyed with a tender glance the woman he loved, though not daring to approach her. Surprised thus during her sleep, Anita appeared to him even more beautiful; a halo of purity and candour seemed to surround her, watch over her repose, and render her holy and unassailable.

After a long and voluptuous contemplation, the Tigrero at length decided on advancing. The window had opened at the slightest push. Don Martial took one step, and found himself in the room, and tottering, mad with fear and love, he fell on his knees by the side of the being he adored.

Anita opened her eyes.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, on seeing Don Martial, "blessed be God!"

The Tigrero surveyed her with moistened eye and panting chest. But suddenly the girl drew herself up; her memory returned, and with it that timid modesty innate in all women.

"Begone," she said, recoiling to the extremity of the room, "begone, caballero! How are you here?"

The Tigrero humbly bowed his head.

"Heaven," he said, in an inarticulate voice, "Heaven alone has conducted

our side, senorita, as you yourself said. Oh, pardon me for having
surprise you thus! I have committed a great fault, I am aware; but
tune menaces you—I feel it, I guess it. You are alone, without sup-
ly arm, my heart, are yours: dispose of them."
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removing her eyes, approached him with short steps, hesitating and
g despite herself. When she arrived near him she remained for a
undecided. At length she laid her two small, dainty hands on his
s, and placed her gentle face so near his, that the Tigrero felt on his
the freshness of her embalmed breath, while her long, black, and per-
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y," she said to him, starting back with the ravishing movement of a
fawn, while her brow turned purple, "now defend me, Don Martial; for
resence of God, who sees us and judges us, I am your wife!"
Tigrero leaped on his feet beneath the sting of this kiss. With a radiant
d sparkling eyes, he seized the girl's arm, and drawing her to a corner
oom, where was a statue of the Virgin—
your knees, senorita," he said.
girl obeyed him.
y Mother of Sorrow!" Don Martial went on, *Nuestra Senora de la Sole-*
ivine succour of the afflicted, who soundest all hearts! thou seest the
f our souls, the holiness of our love. Before thee I take for my wife
nita de Torres. I swear to defend and protect her, before and against
dy, even if I lose my life in the contest I commence this day for the
ss of her I love, and who from this day forth is really my betrothed."
pronouncing this oath in a firm voice the Tigrero turned to the
.
your turn now, senorita," he said to her.
stra Senora de la Soledad!" the girl said, in a voice broken with emo-
hou my only protector since the day of my birth, knowest how truly I
ted to thee! I swear that all this man has said is the truth. I take
my husband in thy sight."
rose, and Dona Anita led the Tigrero to the balcony.
!" she said to him. "Go, my husband, my brother! The man to
hey want to deliver me is called the Count de Lhorailles. To-morrow
reak we leave this place, probably to join him."
ll kill him."
ewell, Don Martial, farewell!"
ewell, Dona Anita! Take courage! I am watching over you."
after imprinting a last and chaste kiss on the pure brow of the young
clambered over the balcony, and hanging by the reata, glided down into
The haciendero's daughter unfastened the running knot, leant out,
owed the Tigrero so long as she could see him; then she closed the win-
.
s, alas!" she murmured, suppressing a sigh, "what have I done? Holy
thou alone canst restore me the courage which is deserting me."
et the curtain fall which veiled the window, and turned to go and kneel

"*Carai!* follow the advice I give you."

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me to your side, senorita, as you yourself said. Oh, pardon me for having dared to surprise you thus! I have committed a great fault, I am aware; but a misfortune menaces you—I feel it, I guess it. You are alone, without support. My arm, my heart, are yours: dispose of them."

These words were uttered by the young man in a choking voice, as he knelt in the middle of the room.

The haciendero's daughter turned her limpid glance on the young man, and, without removing her eyes, approached him with short steps, hesitating and trembling despite herself. When she arrived near him she remained for a moment undecided. At length she laid her two small, dainty hands on his shoulders, and placed her gentle face so near his, that the Tigrero felt on his forehead the freshness of her embalmed breath, while her long, black, and perfumed tresses gently caressed him.

"It is true, then," she said, "you love me?"

"Oh!" the young man said, almost mad with passion.

The Mexican girl bent over him still more, and grazing with her rosy lips the Tigrero's moist brow,—

"Now," she said to him, starting back with the ravishing movement of a startled fawn, while her brow turned purple, "now defend me, Don Martial; for in the presence of God, who sees us and judges us, I am your wife!"

The Tigrero leaped on his feet beneath the sting of this kiss. With a radiant brow and sparkling eyes, he seized the girl's arm, and drawing her to a corner of the room, where was a statue of the Virgin—

"On your knees, senorita," he said.

The girl obeyed him.

"Holy Mother of Sorrow!" Don Martial went on, *Nuestra Senora de la Soledad!* divine succour of the afflicted, who soundest all hearts! thou seest the purity of our souls, the holiness of our love. Before thee I take for my wife Dona Anita de Torres. I swear to defend and protect her, before and against everybody, even if I lose my life in the contest I commence this day for the happiness of her I love, and who from this day forth is really my betrothed."

After pronouncing this oath in a firm voice the Tigrero turned to the maiden.

"It is your turn now, senorita," he said to her.

"*Nuestra Senora de la Soledad!*" the girl said, in a voice broken with emotion, "thou my only protector since the day of my birth, knowest how truly I am devoted to thee! I swear that all this man has said is the truth. I take him for my husband in thy sight."

They rose, and Dona Anita led the Tigrero to the balcony.

"Go!" she said to him. "Go, my husband, my brother! The man to whom they want to deliver me is called the Count de Lhorailles. To-morrow at daybreak we leave this place, probably to join him."

"I will kill him."

"Farewell, Don Martial, farewell!"

"Farewell, Dona Anita! Take courage! I am watching over you."

And after imprinting a last and chaste kiss on the pure brow of the young girl, he clambered over the balcony, and hanging by the reata, glided down into street. The haciendero's daughter unfastened the running knot, leant out, and followed the Tigrero so long as she could see him; then she closed the window again.

"Alas, alas!" she murmured, suppressing a sigh, "what have I done? Holy Virgin, thou alone canst restore me the courage which is deserting me."

She let the curtain fall which veiled the window, and turned to go and kneel

before the Virgin; but suddenly she recoiled, uttering a cry of terror. Two paces from her Don Sylva was standing looking at her with frowning brow and stern face.

"Dona Anita, my daughter," he said, "I have seen and heard everything."

"My father!" the poor child stammered.

"Silence!" he continued. "It is three o'clock: we set out at sunrise. Prepare yourself to marry in a fortnight Don Gaëtan de Lhorailles."'

And, without deigning to add a word, he walked out slowly, carefully closing the door after him.

CHAPTER VII.

A DUEL.

It was about eight in the evening when the Count de Lhorailles left the residence of Don Sylva de Torrès. The streets of Guaymas were thronged with a joyous and motley crowd; the shouts of songs and laughter rose on every side. The piles of gold heaped on the montè tables emitted their yellow and intoxicating reflection in the dazzling gleams of the lights that shone in every door and window: here and there the sound of *vihuelas* and *jarabès* escaped from the *pulquerias*, invaded by the drinkers. The count, elbowed and elbowing, traversed as quickly as was possible the dense groups which at every instant barred his passage.

At length, after numberless difficulties, and wasting at least thrice the time he would have employed under other circumstances, he reached at about ten in the evening, the house where he lodged.

On arrival at the *meson*, the count proceeded first to the corral to see his horse, to which he gave, with his own hand, two trusses of alfalfa.

The count intended to start at one o'clock in order to avoid the heat of the day, and travel more quickly. Besides, after his lengthened conversation with Don Sylva, the noble adventurer was not sorry to find himself alone.

From the moment he had landed in America everything succeeded with him. In a few months his fortune might be thus summed up:—A colony founded under the most favourable auspices, and already on the road of progress and improvement: while keeping his nationality intact—that is to say, his liberty of action and an inviolable neutrality—he was in the service of the Mexican Government, as captain of a free corps of one hundred and fifty devoted men, with whom he could attempt, if not carry out, the wildest enterprises. In the last place he was on the point of marrying the daughter of a man twenty times a millionaire.

Unfortunately, or fortunately, this man, worn out by the enervating eccentricities of Parisian life, no longer felt his heart beat from any emotion of joy, sorrow, or fear: all was dead within him. He was exactly the man wanted to succeed in the country to which accident had sent him. In the great duel of life he had begun in

ı he had an immense advantage over his adversaries—that of never allowing to be directed by passion.

what we have said we have hardly need to add that he did not love the woman ıand he sought. She was young and lovely—all the better. Had she been ugly he would have accepted her hand all the same. What did he care? sought one thing in marriage—a brilliant and envied position.

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day was on the brink of dawning, and, in consequence of that, the night, o its struggle with the twilight, had become more gloomy, as always s during the few moments preceding the apparition of the sun. The uses of the *Rancho* were standing out from the fog, a short distance be m, when the count heard, or fancied he heard, the sound of several hoofs re-echoing on the pebbles behind him.

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His horse was eating heartily, and gaily finishing its alfalfa. The count himself gave it a measure of oats, and then put on the saddle. In Mexico especially, horsemen, whatever the class of society to which they belong, never leave to others the care of attending to their steeds; for in those semi-savage countries the life of the rider depends nearly always upon the vigour and speed of his animal.

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"Who goes there?" he shouted in a loud voice.

The unknown made no reply, and appeared to redouble their

"Who's there?" the count repeated. "Stop, or I fire!"

He uttered these words with such a determined accent, his countenance was so intrepid, that, after a few moments' hesitation, the strangers stopped.

There were two of them. The day, just feebly breaking, permitted the count to distinguish them perfectly. They were dressed in Mexican costume; but their faces were masked.

"Hold, my masters!" the count shouted. "What means this obstinate pursuit?"

"That we probably have an interest in catching you up," a hoarse voice sarcastically replied.

"Then you really are after me?"

"Yes, if you are the stranger known as the Count de Lhorailles."

"I am he," he said without hesitation.

"Very good; then we can come to an understanding."

"I ask nothing better, though you appear to me to be bandits. If you want my purse, take it."

"Keep your purse, caballero; we want to take your life, and not your money."

"Ah, ah! 'tis, then, a trap, followed by an assassination."

"You are mistaken. I offer you a fair fight."

"Hum!" the count said, "a fair fight: two against one—that is rather disproportionate."

"You would be correct if matters were as you assume," the man haughtily replied; "but my companion will content himself with looking on."

The count reflected.

"Pardieu!" he said at last, "it is an extraordinary affair! A duel in Mexico, and with a Mexican!"

"It is true, caballero; but all things must have a beginning."

"Enough of jesting. I ask nothing better than to fight: but, I should not be sorry to know why you force me to fight you."

"For what end?"

"*Corbleu!* Why, to know it. You must understand that I cannot waste my time in fighting with every ruffler I meet on the road."

"It will be enough for you to know that I hate you."

"*Caramba!* I suspected as much."

"Enough chattering," the unknown said haughtily. "Time is flying. We have had sufficient discussion."

"Well, my master, if that is the case get ready. I warn you that I intend to take you both. A Frenchman would never have any difficulty in holding his own against two Mexican bandits."

The three horsemen spurred their horses, and charged. When they met they exchanged pistol shots, and then drew their sabres. The fight was brief, but obstinate. One of the strangers, slightly wounded, was carried away by his horse, and disappeared in a cloud of dust. The count, grazed by a ball, felt his anger changed to fury, and redoubled his efforts to master his foe; but he had before him a rude adversary.

This man, whose eyes he saw gleaming like live coals through the holes in his mask, whirled round him with extraordinary rapidity, making his horse perform the boldest curvets, attacking him incessantly.

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After bowing ironically to the count, he burst into a mocking laugh, spurred

his horse, and started at headlong speed, followed by his silent companion. The count watched them disappear with a pensive air. When they were lost in the obscurity he tossed his head several times, as if to shake off the gloomy thoughts that oppressed him in spite of himself, then picked up his sabre and pistols, took his horse by the bridle, and walked slowly toward the *pulqueria*, near which the fight had taken place.

"Hum!" he muttered to himself as he walked along, "that bandit is right. He knows me, and I have no way of recognising him. By Jupiter, I have a good sound hatred on my shoulders! But, nonsense!" he added. "I was too happy. I wanted an enemy."

At this moment he found himself in front of the *pulqueria*, at the door of which he rapped. Naturally impatient, angered, too, by the accident which had happened to him, and the tremendous struggle he had been engaged in, the count was about to carry out his threat of beating in the door when it was opened.

"*Valga me Dios!*" he exclaimed wrathfully, "is this the way you allow people to be assassinated before your doors, without proceeding to their assistance?"

"Oh, oh!" the pulquero said, "is any one dead?"

"No, thanks to Heaven!" the count replied: "but I had a narrow escape of being killed."

"Oh!" the pulquero said with great nonchalance, "if we were to trouble ourselves about all who shout for help at night, we should have enough to do."

The count shrugged his shoulders and walked in. The door was closed again immediately.

The count was unaware that in Mexico the man who finds a corpse, or brings the assassin to trial, is obliged to pay all the expenses of a justice enormously expensive in itself. In all the Mexican provinces people are so thoroughly convinced of the truth of what we assert, that, so soon as a murder is committed, every one runs off without dreaming of helping the victim.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DEPARTURE.

As Don Sylva had announced, by daybreak all was ready for the start. In Mexico, and specially in Sonora, where roads are mainly remarkable for their absence, the mode of travelling differs utterly from that adopted in Europe.

A journey of only a few days entails interminable cares. You must carry everything with you, because you are certain of finding nothing on the road. Beds, tents, provisions, and water before all, must be carried on mule-back. Without these indispensable precautions you would run a risk of dying from hunger or thirst.

must also be provided with a considerable and well-armed escort, in order to the attacks of wild beasts, Indians, and specially robbers, with whom all the Mexico swarm, owing to the anarchy in which this unhappy country is .

court of the house resembled a hostelry. Fifteen mules laden with bales were while the palanquin in which Dona Anita was to travel was being got Some forty steeds, saddled, bridled, with musquetoons attached to the trous-, and pistols in the holsters, were fastened to rings in the wall, while a peon hand a splendid stallion, magnificently harnessed, which stamped and d its silver bit, which it covered with foam.

e street a crowd of people, among whom were Don Martial and Cucharès, returned from their expedition to the *Rancho*, were curiously regarding this re.

ng all these people, collected by accident or through curiosity, was a man, y an Indian, who, leaning carelessly against the wall, never took his eyes off r of Don Sylva's house.

man, still young, appeared to be an Hiaqui Indian, although an observer, close inspection, would have asserted the contrary ; for there was in the man's ow, in his eyes, whose glitter he tried in vain to moderate, in the haughty and, above all, in the native elegance of his vigorous limbs, which seemed on the model of the Greek Hercules, something proud, resolute, and inde-t, which rather denoted the proud Comanche or ferocious Apache.

Hiaquis are accustomed to come to Guaymas, and let themselves out as en or servants.

st, at about eight o'clock, Don Sylva, giving his hand to his daughter, who essed in a charming travelling costume, appeared. Dona Anita was pale as . Her haggard features, her swollen eyes, testified to the sufferings of the and the restraint she was forced to place on herself, even at this moment, to her bursting into tears in the presence of all. At the sight of the young Don Martial and Cucharès exchanged a rapid glance.

he haciendero's arrival silence was re-established as if by enchantment; the s ran to the heads of their mules; the servants, armed to the teeth, mounted; n Sylva, after assuring himself by a glance that all was ready, and that his had been punctually executed, placed his daughter in the palanquin.

sign from the haciendero, the mules, fastened to each other by the tails, to leave the house behind. Before mounting his horse Don Sylva turned to servant, who, straw hat in hand, respectfully stood near.

ieu, Tio Pelucho!" he said to him. "I intrust the house to you. Keep vatch, and take care of all in it. I leave you Pedrito and Florentio to help

u may be at ease, *mi amo*," the old man answered, saluting his master. ks to heaven, this is not the first time you have left me alone here."

u are a good servant, Tio Pelucho," Don Sylva said, with a smile.

y God bless you, *mi amo*, as well as the *nina*!" the old man continued, g himself

od bye, Tio Pelucho," the young lady then said, leaning out of the palanquin. old man bowed with visible delight. Don Sylva gave the order for departure, whole caravan started in the direction of the Rancho de San José.

as one of those magnificent mornings only known in these blessed regions. ght storm had entirely swept the sky, which was of a pale blue. The sun, high in the horizon, shot forth its hot beams, which were slightly tempered odoriferous vapours exhaling from the ground. The atmosphere, impregnated d and penetrating odours, was of extraordinary transparency; a light breeze

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"*Valga me Dios!*" he exclaimed wrathfully, "is this the way you al people to be assassinated before your doors, without proceeding to th assistance?"

"Oh, oh!" the pulquero said, "is any one dead?"

"No, thanks to Heaven!" the count replied: "but I had a narrow escape being killed."

"Oh!" the pulquero said with great nonchalance, "if we were to trou ourselves about all who shout for help at night, we should have enough to do

The count shrugged his shoulders and walked in. The door was closed ag immediately.

The count was unaware that in Mexico the man who finds a corpse, or brin the assassin to trial, is obliged to pay all the expenses of a justice enormou expensive in itself. In all the Mexican provinces people are so thoroughly co vinced of the truth of what we assert, that, so soon as a murder is committ every one runs off without dreaming of helping the victim.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DEPARTURE.

As Don Sylva had announced, by daybreak all was ready for the start. Mexico, and specially in Sonora, where roads are mainly remarkable for their a sence, the mode of travelling differs utterly from that adopted in Europe.

A journey of only a few days entails interminable cares. You must carry ever thing with you, because you are certain of finding nothing on the road. Beds, ten provisions, and water before all, must be carried on mule-back. Without these i dispensable precautions you would run a risk of dying from hunger or thirst.

You must also be provided with a considerable and well-armed escort, in order to repulse the attacks of wild beasts, Indians, and specially robbers, with whom all the roads of Mexico swarm, owing to the anarchy in which this unhappy country is plunged.

The court of the house resembled a hostelry. Fifteen mules laden with bales were waiting while the palanquin in which Dona Anita was to travel was being got ready. Some forty steeds, saddled, bridled, with musquetoons attached to the trous-sequins, and pistols in the holsters, were fastened to rings in the wall, while a peon held in hand a splendid stallion, magnificently harnessed, which stamped and champed its silver bit, which it covered with foam.

In the street a crowd of people, among whom were Don Martial and Cucharès, already returned from their expedition to the *Rancho*, were curiously regarding this departure.

Among all these people, collected by accident or through curiosity, was a man, evidently an Indian, who, leaning carelessly against the wall, never took his eyes off the door of Don Sylva's house.

This man, still young, appeared to be an Hiaqui Indian, although an observer, after a close inspection, would have asserted the contrary; for there was in the man's wide brow, in his eyes, whose glitter he tried in vain to moderate, in the haughty mouth, and, above all, in the native elegance of his vigorous limbs, which seemed carved on the model of the Greek Hercules, something proud, resolute, and independent, which rather denoted the proud Comanche or ferocious Apache.

The Hiaquis are accustomed to come to Guaymas, and let themselves out as workmen or servants.

At last, at about eight o'clock, Don Sylva, giving his hand to his daughter, who was dressed in a charming travelling costume, appeared. Dona Anita was pale as a ghost. Her haggard features, her swollen eyes, testified to the sufferings of the night, and the restraint she was forced to place on herself, even at this moment, to prevent her bursting into tears in the presence of all. At the sight of the young lady, Don Martial and Cucharès exchanged a rapid glance.

On the haciendero's arrival silence was re-established as if by enchantment; the *arrieros* ran to the heads of their mules; the servants, armed to the teeth, mounted; and Don Sylva, after assuring himself by a glance that all was ready, and that his orders had been punctually executed, placed his daughter in the palanquin.

At a sign from the haciendero, the mules, fastened to each other by the tails, began to leave the house behind. Before mounting his horse Don Sylva turned to an old servant, who, straw hat in hand, respectfully stood near.

"Adieu, Tio Pelucho!" he said to him. "I intrust the house to you. Keep good watch, and take care of all in it. I leave you Pedrito and Florentio to help you."

"You may be at ease, *mi amo*," the old man answered, saluting his master. "Thanks to heaven, this is not the first time you have left me alone here."

"You are a good servant, Tio Pelucho," Don Sylva said, with a smile.

"May God bless you, *mi amo*, as well as the *nina*!" the old man continued, crossing himself

"Good bye, Tio Pelucho," the young lady then said, leaning out of the palanquin.

The old man bowed with visible delight. Don Sylva gave the order for departure, and the whole caravan started in the direction of the Rancho de San José.

It was one of those magnificent mornings only known in these blessed regions. The night storm had entirely swept the sky, which was of a pale blue. The sun, already high in the horizon, shot forth its hot beams, which were slightly tempered by the odoriferous vapours exhaling from the ground. The atmosphere, impregnated by acrid and penetrating odours, was of extraordinary transparency; a light breeze

refreshed the air at intervals; flocks of birds, glistening with a thousand colours, flew in every direction, and the mules following the bell of the *nena madrina*—the mother mule—were urged on by the songs of the *arrieros*.

The caravan moved along gaily through the sandy plain, raising round it clouds of dust, and forming a long twining serpent in the endless turnings of the road. A vanguard of ten servants explored the neighbourhood, examining the bushes, and shifting sand-heaps. Don Sylva smoked a cigar while conversing with his daughter; and a rear-guard, formed of twenty resolute men, closed the march, and insured the security of the convoy.

They were already far from Guaymas, the white houses of which town had long ago disappeared, when the capataz, leaving the head of the caravan, galloped back to the palanquin, where Don Sylva was still riding.

"Well, Blas," the latter said, "what is there new?"

"Nothing, excellency," the capataz replied: "all is going on well, and in an hour at the latest we shall be at the *Rancho*."

"Whence, then, the haste you showed to join me again?"

"Oh! excellency, an idea occurred to me."

"Ah, ah!" Don Sylva said. "What is it, my lad?"

"Look, excellency," the capataz continued.

"Ah! what is that? A fire, if I am not mistaken."

"It is indeed a fire, excellency. Look here;" and he pointed east-south-east.

"There's another. Who on earth has lighted the fires on these scarped points? What can their object be?"

"Oh! it is easy enough to understand that, excellency."

"Do you think so? Well, then, explain."

"I am willing to do so. Stay," he said, pointing to the first fire; "that hill is the Cerro del Gigante."

"It is."

"And that," the capataz continued, "pointing to the second fire, "is the Cerro de San Xavier."

"I think it is."

"I am certain of it."

"Well?"

"As we know that a fire cannot kindle itself, and as people do not amuse themselves with a fire when the thermometer is up at a hundred——"

"You conclude from that——?"

"That these fires have been lighted by robbers or Indians, who have had scent of our departure."

"Stay, stay! that is most logical, my friend. Continue your explanation, for it interests me enormously."

Don Sylva's capataz, or steward, was a tall, herculean fellow of about forty, devoted body and soul to his master, who placed the greatest confidence in him.

"Oh! now," he went on, "I have not much more to say, except that the ladrones know, through that signal, that Don Sylva and his daughter have left Guaymas."

"My faith! you are right. I had forgotten all those details. But we are numerous enough not to fear any insult; but if any of those picaros dare to attack us, *cascaras!* they will find their work cut out for them, I am convinced. Push on, then, without any fear, Blas, my boy! Nothing unpleasant can happen to us."

The capataz saluted his master, and galloped back to the head of the column. An hour later they reached the *Rancho* without any accident.

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"Whatever you think proper, my friend. But say, do you set out again, or remain here?"

"I go, I go! In stopping here my sole object was to await you. If you consent, we will travel together."

"Capital! Let us go," he added, making a sign to the capataz. The latter, on seeing his master conversing with the count, had ordered a halt; but now the caravan started again.

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"Quite true," the count observed.

"Go to him," Don Sylva commanded.

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"Why, José, you are a rich man."

"Yes," he said, "Tiburon has money."

"Is your name Tiburon (shark)?" the capataz said distrustfully. "That is an ugly name."

"Why so? The pale-faces gave that name to their red son, and he finds it good."

"Is your village far from here?"

"If I had a good horse I should arrive in three days. My tribe is between the Gila and Guetzalli?"

"Do you know Guetzalli?"

The Indian shrugged his shoulders disdainfully.

"The red-skins know all the hunting-grounds on the Gila," he said.

At this moment the caravan caught up.

"Well, Blas," Don Sylva asked, "who is the man?"

"A Hiaqui Indian. He is returning to his village, after earning a trifle at the Puerto."

"Can he be of service to us?"

"I believe so. His tribe, he says, is encamped near the Gila."

"Ah!" said the count, drawing nearer, "does he belong to the White Horse tribe?"

"Yes," the Indian said.

"In that case I answer for the man," the count said. "Those Indians are very gentle: they are miserable beggars, often starving; and I employ them."

"Listen," Don Sylva said, tapping the red-skin's shoulder amicably. "We are going to Guetzalli."

"Good!"

"We want a faithful and devoted guide."

"Tiburon is poor; he has only a poor donkey."

"Do not trouble yourself about that," the haciendero added. "I will give you such a horse as you never mounted. On arriving at the hacienda I will add ten piastres."

The Indian's eye sparkled with greed at this proposal.

"Where is the horse?" he asked.

"Here," the capataz replied.

The red-skin looked at it with the eye of a connoisseur.

"Well, do you accept?" the haciendero said.

"Yes."

"Then get off your donkey, and let us start."

"I cannot abandon my donkey; it is a famous brute."

"That need not trouble you; it can follow with the baggage mules."

The Indian gave a nod of assent. In a few minutes he was mounted, and the caravan continued its march. The capataz alone did not appear to place any great confidence in the guide.

"I will watch him," he said in a low voice.

The march went on the whole day without any fresh incident, and the next day they reached the Rio Gila.

It was nearly three o'clock when the travellers saw before them the colony of Guetzalli, founded by the Count de Lhorailles. This colony was composed of a hacienda, round which were grouped the labourer's huts.

The hacienda was built on a peninsula nearly three leagues in circumference, covered with wood and pasture, on which more than four thousand head of cattle grazed peacefully, returning at night to the parks adjoining the house, which was surrounded by the river, forming an *enciente* of natural fortresses. The tongue of land, not more than eight yards in width, attaching it to the main

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"I am certain of it."

The two men checked their horses and waited.

"Who goes there?" a voice shouted in French.

"Well, what do you think of it now?" the count said to the haciendero.

"It is perfectly wonderful," the latter observed.

"Friends," said the count. "Lhorailles and freedom!"

"All right—open!" the voice commanded. "They are friends."

The peons lowered the drawbridge (the only passage by which the hacienda could be entered), the caravan passed over, and the drawbridge was immediately raised after them.

"You will excuse me, captain," Martin Leroux said, respectfully approaching the count, "but, although I recognized you, we live in a country where, I think, too great prudence cannot be exercised."

"You have done your duty, lieutenant. Any news?"

"Not much. A troop of horse I sent out into the plain discovered a deserted fire."

"We will be on our guard."

"Oh! I keep good watch, especially at present, for the month is drawing on which the Comanches call so audaciously the Mexican moon."

"I share your views entirely. Redouble your vigilance, and all will be well."

"I will now withdraw. You know, captain, that you intrust the internal details to me, and I must be everywhere in turn."

"Go, lieutenant; let me not keep you."

The old soldier saluted his chief, and retired with a friendly signal to the capataz.

The count led his guests to the apartments kept for visitors.

"Pray rest yourself, Don Sylva," he said; "you and Dona Anita must be fatigued with your journey. To-morrow we will talk about our business."

"Whenever you like, my friend."

The count bowed to his guests, and withdrew. Since his meeting with his betrothed he had not exchanged a word with her. In the courtyard he found the Hiaqui Indian smoking.

"Here," he said, "are the ten piastres promised to you."

"Thanks," said the Indian as he took them.

"Now, what are you going to do?"

"Rest myself till to-morrow; then join the men of my tribe."

"Are you in a great hurry to see them?"

"I? Not at all."

"Stay here, then."

"Shall I be paid?"

"Amply. Does that suit you?"

"Yes."

"Then you will remain?"

"I will."

The count went away, not noticing the strange expression in the glance the Indian turned on him.

CHAPTER IX.

A MEETING IN THE DESERT.

T three musket shots' distance from the hacienda, in a thicket of nopals, c trees, and mesquites, intermingled with a few mahogany cedars, wild n-wood trees, and pines, just an hour before sunset, a horseman dis- ted; hobbled his horse, a magnificent mustang, with flashing eyes and hest; then, after turning an inquiring glance around, probably satisfied the profound silence and tranquillity pervading at the spot, he made his gements for camping.

is man was Eagle-head, the Comanche chief.

er laying his rifle by his side he collected dry wood, and lit a fire; then rew several yards of tasajo on the ashes, with several maize tortillas; and ese preparations for a comfortable supper made, he filled his calumet hed near the fire, and began smoking.

o hours thus passed peacefully, and nothing disturbed the repose the chief njoying.

e Indian still remained motionless, contenting himself with turning now hen to his horse, which was gaily devouring the climbing peas.

ddenly Eagle-head looked up, bent forward, and, without otherwise dis- ng himself, stretched out his hand to his rifle, while the mustang left off g, laid back its ears, and neighed noisily.

the end of a moment the chief's frowning brows returned to their proper on, he re-assumed his easy posture, and, lifting his two forefingers to his h, imitated with rare perfection the harmonious modulations of the can nightingale.

ly a few minutes passed ere the cry of the night hawk was twice heard in irection of the river. Soon after the sound of horses became audible, led with the cracking of branches and the rustling of leaves, and two ted men made their appearance.

ese two horsemen were Don Louis and Belhumeur. They hobbled their s by the side of the chief's, lay down by the fire, and, on the Indian's invitation, vigorously attacked the supper prepared for them. They had ne *Rancho* the previous evening.

e Count de Lhorailles had invited them at the *pulqueria* to join his party. Belhumeur had declined the offer. Not knowing for what purpose the n chief had appointed to meet him, he did not care to mix up a stranger friend's affairs. Still, the three men had parted on excellent terms, and ount pressed Don Louis and the Canadian to pay him a visit at Guetzalli, fer to which they had replied evasively.

en they had ended their meal Belhumeur filled his pipe, and put out his to take up a coal.

Vait," the chief said sharply.

is was the first word the Indian uttered. Belhumeur looked at him.

l'm!" he said, "what is the matter now?"

do not know yet," the chief answered. "I have heard a suspicious ng in the bushes."

um!" the Canadian went on, "that is growing serious. What do you Louis?"

"All right—open!" the voice commanded. "They are friends."

The peons lowered the drawbridge (the only passage by which the hacie could be entered), the caravan passed over, and the drawbridge was im diately raised after them.

"You will excuse me, captain," Martin Leroux said, respectfully approach the count, "but, although I recognized you, we live in a country where, I thi too great prudence cannot be exercised."

"You have done your duty, lieutenant. Any news?"

"Not much. A troop of horse I sent out into the plain discovered a deser fire."

"We will be on our guard."

"Oh! I keep good watch, especially at present, for the month is drawing which the Comanches call so audaciously the Mexican moon."

"I share your views entirely. Redouble your vigilance, and all will be we

"I will now withdraw. You know, captain, that you intrust the inter details to me, and I must be everywhere in turn."

"Go, lieutenant; let me not keep you."

The old soldier saluted his chief, and retired with a friendly signal to capataz.

The count led his guests to the apartments kept for visitors.

"Pray rest yourself, Don Sylva," he said; "you and Dona Anita must fatigued with your journey. To-morrow we will talk about our business."

"Whenever you like, my friend."

The count bowed to his guests, and withdrew. Since his meeting with betrothed he had not exchanged a word with her. In the courtyard he fou the Hiaqui Indian smoking.

"Here," he said, "are the ten piastres promised to you."

"Thanks," said the Indian as he took them.

"Now, what are you going to do?"

"Rest myself till to-morrow; then join the men of my tribe."

"Are you in a great hurry to see them?"

"I? Not at all."

"Stay here, then."

"Shall I be paid?"

"Amply. Does that suit you?"

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About three musket shots' distance from the hacienda, in a thicket of nopals, mastic trees, and mesquites, intermingled with a few mahogany cedars, wild cotton-wood trees, and pines, just an hour before sunset, a horseman dismounted; hobbled his horse, a magnificent mustang, with flashing eyes and fine chest; then, after turning an inquiring glance around, probably satisfied with the profound silence and tranquillity pervading at the spot, he made his arrangements for camping.

This man was Eagle-head, the Comanche chief.

After laying his rifle by his side he collected dry wood, and lit a fire; then he threw several yards of tasajo on the ashes, with several maize tortillas; and all these preparations for a comfortable supper made, he filled his calumet crouched near the fire, and began smoking.

Two hours thus passed peacefully, and nothing disturbed the repose the chief was enjoying.

The Indian still remained motionless, contenting himself with turning now and then to his horse, which was gaily devouring the climbing peas.

Suddenly Eagle-head looked up, bent forward, and, without otherwise disturbing himself, stretched out his hand to his rifle, while the mustang left off eating, laid back its ears, and neighed noisily.

At the end of a moment the chief's frowning brows returned to their proper position, he re-assumed his easy posture, and, lifting his two forefingers to his mouth, imitated with rare perfection the harmonious modulations of the Mexican nightingale.

Only a few minutes passed ere the cry of the night hawk was twice heard in the direction of the river. Soon after the sound of horses became audible, mingled with the cracking of branches and the rustling of leaves, and two mounted men made their appearance.

These two horsemen were Don Louis and Belhumeur. They hobbled their horses by the side of the chief's, lay down by the fire, and, on the Indian's silent invitation, vigorously attacked the supper prepared for them. They had left the *Rancho* the previous evening.

The Count de Lhorailles had invited them at the *pulqueria* to join his party. but Belhumeur had declined the offer. Not knowing for what purpose the Indian chief had appointed to meet him, he did not care to mix up a stranger in his friend's affairs. Still, the three men had parted on excellent terms, and the count pressed Don Louis and the Canadian to pay him a visit at Guetzalli, an offer to which they had replied evasively.

When they had ended their meal Belhumeur filled his pipe, and put out his hand to take up a coal.

"Wait," the chief said sharply.

This was the first word the Indian uttered. Belhumeur looked at him.

"H'm!" he said, "what is the matter now?"

"I do not know yet," the chief answered. "I have heard a suspicious rustling in the bushes."

"Hum!" the Canadian went on, "that is growing serious. What do you think, Louis?"

"In the desert," the latter replied slowly, "everything has a cause. Stay," he added, as he raised his head, "have you often seen at this hour a flight of condors soaring in the sky?"

The chief shook his head.

"There is something the matter," he muttered; "the dogs of Apaches are hunting."

"'Tis possible," Belhumeur said.

"Before all," the Frenchman observed, "let us put out the fire; its gleam, slight as it is, might betray us."

His companions followed his advice, and the fire was extinguished in a second.

"My brother, the pale-face, is prudent," the chief said courteously. "He knows the desert."

Don Louis thanked the chief.

"And now," Belhumeur went on, "we are almost invisible—no visible danger threatens us; so let us hold a council. The chief had the first scent of peril: it is therefore, his place to tell us what he observed."

The Indian wrapped himself up in his fressada; the three men drew closer, so as to be able to speak in a whisper, and the council commenced.

"Since sunrise," Eagle-head said, "I have been marching in the desert. I was anxious to reach the place of meeting, and proceeded in a straight line. All along the road I found evident signs of the passage of a numerous band; the tracks were wide and full, like those made by a party of warriors so large that they care not for discovery."

"Deuce, deuce!" the Canadian muttered.

"At first I did not pay much attention to the trail, but presently I began to feel restless."

"What reason rendered you restless?"

"I believe that the expedition is directed against the great cabin of the pale-faces at Guetzalli."

"What makes you suppose so?" Louis asked.

"This. At the hour the alligator leaves the mud of the bank to plunge again into the Gila, the sound of horses a short distance off compelled me, lest I should be discovered, to bury myself in a thicket. When sheltered I looked out. A band of pale-faces passed within bow-shot of me, in the direction of Guetzalli."

"I know who they were," Belhumeur remarked. "I recognised, in spite of the care he had taken to render himself unrecognisable, the man who served as guide to the party."

"Who was it?"

"A man my brother knows. It was the Black Bear, chief of the White Crow tribe."

"If you are not mistaken, chief, horrible things will be done ere long. The Black Bear is the implacable enemy of the whites."

"That was the reason I spoke to my brother. But, after all, what does it concern us?"

The Canadian shook his head.

"Yes, what you say is true," he replied. "We ought, perhaps, to abandon the inhabitants of the hacienda to their fate, and not interfere in matters which may cause us great misery."

"Do you intend to act thus?" the Frenchman asked.

"I do not say so positively," the Canadian replied; "but the case is a difficult one. We shall have to deal with numerous enemies."

"Yes, but the men about to be surprised are your fellow-countrymen."

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"Yes, but the men about to be surprised are your fellow-countrymen."

"It is true; and it is that which renders the affair so awkward. I do not wish to see these unhappy beings scalped."

"Why reflect thus?"

"By Jove! in order to weigh the for and against. There is nothing I detest so much as rushing headlong into an enterprise of which I have not calculated all the consequences beforehand."

Don Louis could not refrain from smiling at this singular reasoning.

"I have my plan," the Canadian went on. "The night will not pass without our learning something new. Let us draw near the bank of the river. I am greatly mistaken, or we shall soon obtain there the information we require."

The three men lay down on the ground, and began crawling silently in the direction indicated by Belhumeur.

The night was magnificent, the moon brilliant, and the atmosphere so diaphanous, that objects might have been distinguished for a great distance on an open plain. The three adventurers did not leave their covert, but hid themselves in an almost inextricable thicket.

For several hours the three men remained motionless and watchful, eye and ear strained, with the finger on the trigger of the rifle, through fear of a surprise; but nothing had yet happened to corroborate the suspicions of Eagle-head, or the previsions of Belhumeur. Suddenly Louis felt the chief's arm resting gently on his shoulder, as he pointed to the river. The Frenchman rose on his knees and looked.

An almost imperceptible movement agitated the surface of the river, as if an alligator were floating along.

"Oh, oh!" Belhumeur muttered; "I fancy that is what we are expecting."

A black mass soon appeared, floating rather than swimming on the water, and noiselessly advancing toward the spot where the hunters were in ambush. At the end of a few moments this body, whatever it might be, stopped, and the cry of the prairie dog was heard several times repeated.

At once the howl of the coyote broke forth forcibly so near the three men, that, in spite of themselves, they shuddered, and a man hanging by the hands dropped down from an oak tree, scarcely three yards from the spot where they were.

This man wore the Mexican costume.

"Come, chief," he said in a low voice, though not venturing down to the river, "come, we are alone."

The man thus addressed emerged from the water, and clambered up the bank.

"My brother speaks too loudly," he said. "In the desert a man is never alone."

"Bah! what you say has not common sense. Who on earth would play the spy on us?"

The Indian shook his head. Now that he was standing only a few paces from the adventurers, Belhumeur perceived that Eagle-head was not mistaken, and that the man was really the Black Bear. The two men stood for a moment silently gazing at each other. The Mexican was the first to speak.

"You have manœuvred well," he said in an insinuating voice. I know not how you managed it, but you have succeeded in entering the fort."

"Yes," the Indian replied.

"Now we have only our final arrangements to make. Here is what I pro-

mised you. I ought not to pay you till afterwards, but I do not wish the slightest cloud to rise between us."

The Indian silently rejected the purse the other held out to him.

"The Black Bear has reflected," he said coldly.

"On what, may I ask?"

"A warrior is not a woman to waste his words. What my brother offered the Black Bear, the Apache chief refuses."

The Mexican repressed with difficulty a sign of disappointment.

"Then," he said, "you have not warned your warriors?"

"The Black Bear has warned his warriors. He will attack the pale-faces."

"What did you say this moment? I confess that I do not comprehend you, chief."

"Because the pale-face will not comprehend. The Black Bear will attack the hacienda, but on his own account."

"That was agreed between us, I fancy."

"Yes; but the Black Bear has seen the singing-bird."

"Scoundrel!" the Mexican shouted in his wrath; "you would betray me in that way?"

"How have I betrayed the pale-face?" the Indian replied, still perfectly calm. "He offered me a bargain; I refused it. I see nothing dishonest in that."

The Mexican bit his lip with rage.

"I will revenge myself," he said, stamping his foot.

"The Black Bear is a powerful chief; he laughs at the croaking of the ravens."

With a movement swift as thought, the Mexican rushed on the Indian, seized him by the throat, and, drawing his dagger, raised it to strike him. But the Apache carefully watched the actions of his opponent: by a movement no less swift he freed himself from his grasp, and with one bound was out of reach.

"The pale-face has dared to touch a chief," he said in a hoarse voice; "he shall die."

The Mexican shrugged his shoulders, and seized the pistols in his girdle.

It is impossible to say how this scene would have ended, had not a new incident happened to change its features completely. From the same tree in which the Mexican had been hidden a few moments previously, another individual suddenly fell, rushed on the chief, and hurled him to the ground before he could make a gesture to defend himself.

"By Jove!" Belhumeur muttered with a stifled laugh, "there must be a legion of devils in that tree."

The Mexican and the man who had come so luckily to his help had securely tied the Indian with a reata.

"Now you are in my power, chief," the Mexican said, "and you will be obliged to consent to my terms."

The Apache grinned, and uttered a shrill whistle.

At this signal fifty Indian warriors appeared, as if they had sprung from the ground, and that so suddenly, that the two white men were surrounded.

"Deuce!" Belhumeur said in an aside, "that complicates matters. How will they get out of that?"

"And we?" Louis whispered in his ear.

The Canadian replied by that shrug of the shoulders which signifies in all languages, "We must trust in heaven."

Cucharès!" the Mexican said to his companion, "hold that scoundrel , and at the least suspicious movement kill him like a dog."
Be easy," Don Martial," the lepero answered, pulling from his vaquera a knife.
What decision does the Black Bear come to?" the Tigrero went on.
The life of a chief belongs to thee, dog of the pale-faces: take it if thou t!" the Apache replied with a smile of contempt.
will not kill you: not because I am afraid, for I know not such a feeling," Mexican said, "but because I disdain to shed the blood of an enemy who is celess."
Kill, me, I say, if thou canst, but insult me not. Hasten! for my ors may lose patience, sacrifice thee to their wrath, and thou mightest die enged."
You are jesting; you know perfectly well that your warriors will not move ch so long as I hold you thus. I propose to offer you peace."
Peace!" the chief said. "On what conditions?"
Two only. Cucharès, unfasten the reata, but watch him closely.
e lepero obeyed.
Thanks," the chief said as he rose to his knees. "Speak; I am listening— urs are open."
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Good, and next?"
Next, you will pledge yourself to remain with your warriors, and not return hacienda.
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Brothers!" he said in a loud voice, "this pale-face is the friend of the Bear."
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Farewell!" the Black Bear said, saluting his enemy. "In twenty-four I shall be on your trail."
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The lepero obeyed.

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"First, my comrade and myself will be free to retire whither we please."

"Good, and next?"

"Next, you will pledge yourself to remain with your warriors, and not return to the hacienda.

"Listen to me in your turn, then, pale-face. I accept your conditions, but I must tell you mine."

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"I will not re-enter the hacienda save with the eagle feather in my war-tuft, at the head of my warriors, and that before the sun has thrice set behind the lofty peaks of the mountains of the day."

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And he retired with a slow and firm step, followed by his warriors.

"On my faith, Don Martial," the lepero said, "you were wrong to let that Indian dog escape."

The Tigrero shrugged his shoulders.

"Were we not obliged to get out of the wasp's nest into which we had thrust our heads?" he said. "Let us go and find our horses."

"One moment, if you will grant it me," Belhumeur said, leaving his hiding-place.

"What's this?" Cucharès said, pulling out his knife again, while Don Martial coolly cocked his pistols.

"This! caballero," Belhumeur said quietly, "I fancy you can see plainly enough."

"I see three men."

"Indeed, you are not at all mistaken. Three men who have been witnesses of the scene you ended so bravely—three men who held themselves ready to come to your aid, and who now offer to make common cause with you, to prevent the plunder of the hacienda by the Apaches. Does that suit you?"

"That depends," the Tigrero said. "I must know first what interest urges you to act in this manner."

"That of being agreeable to you in the first place," Belhumeur replied politely, "and next, the desire to save the scalps of the poor wretches menaced."

"In that case I heartily accept your offer."

"Be good enough, then, to follow us to our camping-ground, that we may discuss the plan of the campaign."

So soon as Cucharès noticed that the men who presented themselves so strangely were really friends, he returned his knife to his boot, and went in search of the horses. He arrived at this moment, leading the two horses, and the five men proceeded together to the camping-ground.

"Take care," Belhumeur said to Don Martial; "you have made yourself an implacable enemy this night. If you do not make haste to kill him, one day or another the Black Bear will kill you."

"I know it; so I shall take my precautions, you may be sure."

"That is your concern. Perhaps it would have been better to get rid of him."

"How could I imagine I had friends so near me?"

"Well, it is no use crying over spilt milk."

"Do you believe that he will keep his conditions?"

"You do not know the Black Bear; he is a man of noble sentiments; his words were always frank."

"They were."

"Be certain, then, that he will keep his promise."

The conversation was interrupted. Don Martial had suddenly become pensive. The Apache's menaces gave him a good deal to think about. The camp was reached, and Eagle-head immediately set to work rekindling the fire."

"What are you about?" Belhumeur observed to him. "You will reveal our presence."

"No," the Indian said, shaking his head. "The Black Bear has retired with his warriors."

The fire soon crackled again. The five men crouched round it joyfully, lit their pipes, and began smoking.

"Let us now see how best to foil the plans of these demons," the Mexican said.

"It is very simple," Louis interposed. "One of us will proceed to-morrow to the hacienda, to warn the owner of what has passed this night."

"Yes, I believe those are the best means, and we will employ them."

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Mexican repressed a lively movement of annoyance.

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hunters interchanged a few more remarks, then wrapped themselves in lankets, lay down on the ground, and speedily fell asleep. The pro- t silence fell on the clearing, which was but dimly lighted by the reddish the expiring fire. The adventurers had been asleep for about two when the branches of a shrub were gently parted, and a man made his ance.

topped for a moment, seemed to be listening, then crawled without the t sound toward the spot where the Tigrero was reposing. It would een easy to recognise the Black Bear by the light of the fire. The chief plucked his scalping-knife from his girdle, and laid it gently on rero's chest; then casting a parting glance around, to convince himself e five men still slept, he retired with the same precautions, and soon dis- ed in the scrub, which closed upon him.

CHAPTER X.

BEFORE THE ATTACK.

first cry of the maukawis—that is to say at sunrise—the adventurers

e first movement Don Martial made, a knife fell on the ground. The n picked it up, and uttered a cry of amazement and almost of terror as ed it to his companions. It was a scalping-knife.

at is the meaning of this?" he asked.

-head seized it, and examined it carefully.

"Were we not obliged to get out of the wasp's nest into which we thrust our heads?" he said. "Let us go and find our horses."

"One moment, if you will grant it me," Belhumeur said, leaving his hid place.

"What's this?" Cucharès said, pulling out his knife again, while Martial coolly cocked his pistols.

"This! caballero," Belhumeur said quietly, "I fancy you can see pla enough."

"I see three men."

"Indeed, you are not at all mistaken. Three men who have been witne of the scene you ended so bravely—three men who held themselves read come to your aid, and who now offer to make common cause with you prevent the plunder of the hacienda by the Apaches. Does that suit you?"

"That depends," the Tigrero said. "I must know first what interest ur you to act in this manner."

"That of being agreeable to you in the first place," Belhumeur repl politely, "and next, the desire to save the scalps of the poor wretc menaced."

"In that case I heartily accept your offer."

"Be good enough, then, to follow us to our camping-ground, that we m discuss the plan of the campaign."

So soon as Cucharès noticed that the men who presented themselves strangely were really friends, he returned his knife to his boot, and went search of the horses. He arrived at this moment, leading the two horses, a the five men proceeded together to the camping-ground.

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"Yes, I believe those are the best means, and we will employ them."

"Five men are as nothing against five hundred," Eagle-head observed; we must warn the pale-faces."

"That is assuredly the plan we must follow," the Tigrero remarked; "but which of us will consent to go to the hacienda?"

"I fancy there is some love story hidden under all this," the Canadian observed slyly.

"What need of further discussion?" Louis interrupted. "With to-morrow's dawn I will go to the hacienda."

"That is agreed on, then, and all is settled," Belhumeur said.

"Then, so soon as our horses have rested, my comrade and myself will return to Guaymas," said Don Martial.

"No, you will not, if you please," the Frenchman objected. "I fancy it is proper that you should know the result of the mission I undertake, for it concerns you even more than us. I suspect——"

The Mexican repressed a lively movement of annoyance.

"You are right," he replied; "I did not think of that."

The hunters interchanged a few more remarks, then wrapped themselves in their blankets, lay down on the ground, and speedily fell asleep. The profoundest silence fell on the clearing, which was but dimly lighted by the reddish rays of the expiring fire. The adventurers had been asleep for about two hours, when the branches of a shrub were gently parted, and a man made his appearance.

He stopped for a moment, seemed to be listening, then crawled without the slightest sound toward the spot where the Tigrero was reposing. It would have been easy to recognise the Black Bear by the light of the fire. The Apache chief plucked his scalping-knife from his girdle, and laid it gently on the Tigrero's chest; then casting a parting glance around, to convince himself that the five men still slept, he retired with the same precautions, and soon disappeared in the scrub, which closed upon him.

CHAPTER X.

BEFORE THE ATTACK.

At the first cry of the maukawis—that is to say at sunrise—the adventurers awoke.

At the first movement Don Martial made, a knife fell on the ground. The Mexican picked it up, and uttered a cry of amazement and almost of terror as he showed it to his companions. It was a scalping-knife.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked.

Eagle-head seized it, and examined it carefully.

"Wah!" he said, "the Black Bear has been here."

The hunters could not refrain from a movement of alarm.

"It is impossible," Belhumeur observed.

The Indian shook his head.

"This," he continued, "is the Apache chief's scalping-knife; see the *totem* of the tribe?"

"'Tis true."

"The Black Bear is a renowned chief. His heart is large enough to contain a world. Obliged to fiulfil the engagements he has made, he wished to prove to his enemy that he was master of his life. That is the meaning of this knife placed on the chest of the *Yori*."

The adventurers were confounded by so much boldness. The Canadian was the first to recover his coolness.

"*Canario!*" he said, "this Apache dog did right to warn us."

"Hum!" Cucharès said, passing his hands through his thick and matted hair, "I have not the least desire to be scalped."

"Bah!" Belhumeur said, "people recover."

"That is possible; but I don't care to make the attempt."

"And now that day has quite broken," Louis observed. "I fancy the time has arrived for me to go to the hacienda."

"We have not a moment to lose, if we wish to foil the enemy's plans," Don Martial said.

"The more so as we have to take certain measures which it would be as well to determine as soon as possible," Belhumeur remarked.

"Let us arrange a meeting-place," Louis went on. "You cannot wait for me here."

"Well," Belhumeur replied thoughtfully, "but I do not know the country where we now are."

"I know one," Eagle-head said. "I will lead you to it; our pale brother will join us again there."

"Very good, but I must know the spot."

"My brother need not trouble himself about that. When he leaves the great cabin I shall be near him."

"Very good—all right. Good-bye."

Louis saddled his horse, and started at a gallop in the direction of the hacienda.

The Count de Lhorailles was walking about anxiously in the hall of the main body of the building. In spite of himself his meeting with the Mexican occupied his mind.

Another circumstance also redoubled his alarms. At daybreak Diégo Léon, one of his lieutenants, announced to him that the Indian guide brought home with them the previous day had disappeared during the night. The position was becoming serious. The guide was evidently an Indian spy, ordered to inquire into the strength of the hacienda, and the means of surprising it.

The count had been reflecting for a long time, forgetting his guests, when his old lieutenant appeared to him.

"What do you want, Martin?" he asked,

"Excuse me for disturbing you, captain. Diégo Léon has just sent to tell me that a horseman wishes to see you on a serious matter."

"What sort of man is he?"

"A white man, well dressed, and mounted on an excellent horse."

"Hem! did he say nothing further?"

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Louis politely returned the salutation, and replied—
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"What sort of man is he?"

"A white man, well dressed, and mounted on an excellent horse."

"Hem! did he say nothing further?"

"Pardon me. he added this: 'You will say that I am one of the men the count met at San José.'"

"Let him come in," the count said; "'tis a friend."

The lieutenant withdrew.

"What can this man want of me?" muttered the count. "When I asked his friend and himself to accompany me here they both refused. What can have caused such a sudden change? Bah! what is the use of addling one's brains? I shall soon know."

Almost immediately Don Louis appeared, led by the lieutenant.

"What happy accident," the count said graciously, "procures me the honour of this visit?"

Don Louis politely returned the salutation, and replied—

"It is no happy accident that brings me. God grant that I may not be the harbinger of misfortune."

"What do you mean, senor?" the count asked. "I do not understand you."

"You will soon do so. But speak French, if you have no objection; we shall understand each other more easily," he said.

"What!" the count exclaimed in surprise, "you speak French?"

"Yes," Louis said, "for I have the honour of being your fellow-countryman. I have quitted our country for more than ten years."

The expression of the count's face completely changed on hearing these words.

"Oh!" he exclaimed with effusion, "permit me to press your hand, sir. Two Frenchmen who meet in this distant land are brothers; let us talk about France."

"Alas, sir!" Louis replied, with suppressed emotion, "I shall be happy to forget for a few minutes what surrounds us, but unfortunately the moment is a grave one; great dangers threaten you, lost time might produce a fearful catastrophe."

"What have you so terrible to announce to me?"

"Did I not tell you that I was a messenger of evil tidings?"

"No matter. When told by you they will be welcome."

"I hope to be able to help you in warding off the danger that now hangs over you."

"Thanks for your fraternal conduct. Now speak. I am listening to you."

Don Louis, without revealing to the count his meeting with the Tigrero, told him how he had overheard a conversation between his late guide and several Apache warriors ambushed in the vicinity of the hacienda, and the plan they had formed.

"And now, sir," he added, "it is for you to judge of the gravity of this news and the arrangements you will have to make."

"I thank you, sir. When my lieutenant told me of the disappearance of the guide, I immediately saw that I had to do with a spy. As you say, there is not a moment to lose, and I will at once think over the necessary arrangements."

He walked to a table and struck a bell sharply.

"The first lieutenant," he said to a peon who entered. In a few minutes the latter arrived.

"Lieutenant," the count said to him, "take twenty men with you, and scour the country for three leagues round. The Indians are concealed near here."

The old soldier bowed in reply, and prepared to obey.

"One moment," Louis exclaimed, signing him to stop.

"Eh?" Martin Leroux said, turning round in amazement, "you are talking French now."

"As you hear, Louis answered with a smile.

"You wished to make a remark," the count asked.

"I have lived in America a very long time. My home has been the desert, and I know the Indians, whom I have learned to rival in craft. If you allow me I will give you some advice."

"By Jove!" the count exclaimed; "pray speak, my dear countryman. Your advice will be very advantageous to us, I feel assured."

At this moment Don Sylva entered the room.

"Ah!" the count continued, "come hither, my friend. We have great need of you."

"What has happened?" the haciendero asked, as he bowed courteously to all present.

"We are threatened with an attack from the Apaches."

"Indeed, my friend. What do you propose doing?"

"I do not know yet. I had given Don Martin orders to scour the neighbourhood; but this gentlemen appears to be of a different opinion."

"The caballero is right," the Mexican answered, bowing to Don Louis.

"This gentleman came expressly to warn me."

"Then we must make the necessary arrangements as quickly as possible. What is the caballero's opinion?"

"He was about to give it at the moment you came in."

"Then pray do not let me disturb your conference."

"Caballero!" Don Louis began, turning to Don Sylva, "what I am about to say is addressed principally to the French, who, accustomed to European warfare, are, I am convinced, ignorant of Indian tactics."

"'Tis true," the count observed.

"Bah!" Leroux said, twirling his long moustaches with great self-sufficiency, "we will learn them."

"Take care you do not do so at your own expense," Don Louis continued. "Indian war is entirely one of stratagems and ambushes."

"Oh, oh!" the count muttered, "is that their only way of fighting?"

"The only one," the haciendero said.

"Hum!" Leroux remarked, "I fancy it is very like the war in Africa."

"Not so much as you suppose. The Arabs let themselves be seen, while the Apaches, I repeat to you, only show themselves in the utmost extremity."

"Then my plan of pushing forward a reconnoissance——"

'Is impracticable for two reasons: either your horsemen will not discover one of them, or they will be attracted into an ambush, where they will perish to the last man."

"All that this gentleman says is most perfectly true: it is easy to see that he has a great experience of Indian warfare."

"That experience cost my happiness. All those I loved were massacred by these ferocious enemies," Don Louis replied sorrowfully. "Fear the same fate if you do not display the greatest prudence."

"We have here several women, children, and your daughter before all, Don Sylva. I, therefore, accept this gentleman's views, and am determined to act with the greatest circumspection."

"I thank you for my daughter and myself."

"And now, sir, as we are already indebted to you for such good advice, complete your task."

"My advice is as follows," Louis answered seriously. "The Apaches will attack you I know. They make a point of honour of the success of that attack. Hence

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"Without counting forty peons, accustomed to pursuing the Indians," Don Sylva remarked.

"Are those men here at this moment?" Louis asked sharply.

"Yes, sir."

"Oh! that simplifies the question materially. The Indians have now everything to fear instead of you."

"Explain."

"It is evident that you will be attacked from the river. Perhaps, in order to divide your forces, the Indians will make a feigned attack from the side of the isthmus; but that point is too strongly defended for them to attempt to carry it."

"I would call your attention to the fact, sir," the lieutenant said, "that at this moment the river is rendered unnavigable by thousands of floating trees."

"I know not if the river be navigable," Don Louis replied firmly, "but the Apaches will attack you on that side."

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The old soldier went out without any reply, in order to carry out the commands of his chief.

"You see, gentlemen," the count then said, "that I hasten to profit by the counsels you are good enough to give me."

"This gentleman has foreseen everything," the haciendero said; "like him I believe that the house is most exposed on the river front."

"A last word," Don Louis continued."

"Speak, speak, sir."

"Did you not say, calballero, that you brought with you forty peons, accustomed to Indian warfare?"

"Yes, I said so, and it is perfectly true."

"Very good. I believe it would be a master-stroke, which would insure you victory, to place your enemies between two fires."

"Indeed it would," the count exclaimed; "but how to do it? You said, only a moment ago, that it would be imprudent to send out a scouting party."

"I said that the grass and woods are at this moment filled with eyes, who will let no one pass out unnoticed."

"Well?"

"Did I not also tell you that this war was one of stratagems and ambushes?"

"You did; but I do not understand, I confess."

"Senor caballero," Don Louis went on, turning to Don Sylva, "do you intend to remain here?"

"Yes; for certain private reasons I must remain some time here."

"I have no intention, be assured, senor, to interfere in your private affairs. So you remain here?"

"Yes."

"Very good. Have you among your peons a devoted man on whom you can count as on yourself?"

"*Cascaras!* I should think so. I have Blas Vasquez."

"Would you be good enough to tell me who this Blas is?"

"He is my capataz, and I can trust to him as to myself in matters of danger."

"Excellent. Well," continued Louis, "your capataz, to whom you will give your instructions, will put himself at the head of his peons within an hour, and ostensibly take the road to Guaymas; but, so soon as he has gone two or three leagues to a point we shall settle on, he will halt."

"Oh! I understand your plan now. The peons hidden by you will attack the Indians in the rear so soon as the action has commenced."

"That is it."

"But the Apaches? Do you believe they will allow a troop of white men to retire without harassing them?"

"The Indians are too shrewd to oppose them. What good would it do them to attack a body of men who have no baggage? No, no, be easy, caballero, they will not stir: they have too great an interest in remaining invisible."

"And what do you intend to do?"

"The Indians certainly saw me come in this direction. If I went out with them it would betray all. I shall go away alone as I came."

"The plan is so simple and well arranged that it must succeed. Receive our thanks, sir, and be kind enough to tell us your name, that we may know the man to whom we are indebted for so great a service."

"Caballeros," he said, "I am the Count Louis Edward Maxime de Prébois Crancé."

"We are friends, I trust," De Lhorailles said, holding out his hand to him.

"What I have done is a proof of it, I think, sir," the other replied with a bow, but not taking the hand.

"I thank you," the count went on, without appearing to notice Louis' repugnance. "Do you intend to leave us soon?"

"I must. If you will allow me, I will take my leave at once."

"Not before breakfasting, at least."

"You will excuse me, but time presses. I have friends who must be alarmed by my lengthened absence."

"As they know you are at my house, that is impossible, sir," the count said, somewhat piqued.

"They do not know that I arrived here without accident."

"That is different; then I will not delay you. Once again, I thank you, sir."

"I have acted in accordance with my conscience."

The three men quitted the hall, and proceeded towards the isthmus battery, talking of indifferent matters. About half way they met Don Blas, the capataz. Don Sylva made him a sign to join them, and when he was near them explained the part he would have to play.

"*Voto à Brios!*" the capataz exclaimed, joyously. "I thank you, Don Sylva for this good news. We shall have a row at last, then, with those Apache dogs?"

"I trust entirely to you, Blas."

"But at what place must I await this caballero?"

"That is true: we have not fixed the place of meeting."

"About three leagues from here, on the Guaymas road, at a place where the road makes a bend, there is an isolated hill called, I think, *El Pan de Azucar*: you can ambush there without any fear of discovery."

"That is agreed. At about what hour?"

"I cannot say for certain."

A few minutes later Don Louis was riding back to the prairie, while

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CHAPTER XI.

THE MEXICAN MOON.

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Little Panther bowed a second time, and guided the chief along a path through the shrubs. They soon arrived at a *jacal*, which, in the mind ndians, offered the ideal of what was comfortable, through its size, the cy of the colours with which it was painted, and its cleanliness.

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Little Panther walked in behind him. This abode did not in any way rom that of the other Indians. A fire burned in the centre. The Black ade a sign to the other chief to sit down on a buffalo-skull. He chose nself, and sat down near the fire. After a moment's silence, the Black ddressed the Little Panther:

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Suddenly his horse shied. Roughly startled from his reverie, the Frenchman looked up.

Eagle-head stood before him.

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"The great chief is welcome," he said, bowing courteously. "Has my father had a good journey?"

"I have had a good journey, I thank my brother."

"If my father consents, I will lead him to his *jacal*.

"Let us go," the chief said.

The Little Panther bowed a second time, and guided the chief along a path formed through the shrubs. They soon arrived at a *jacal*, which, in the mind of the Indians, offered the ideal of what was comfortable, through its size, the brilliancy of the colours with which it was painted, and its cleanliness.

"My father is at home," the Little Panther said, respectfully, falling back to let the Black Bear pass. The latter entered.

"My brother will follow me," he said.

The Little Panther walked in behind him. This abode did not in any way differ from that of the other Indians. A fire burned in the centre. The Black Bear made a sign to the other chief to sit down on a buffalo-skull. He chose one himself, and sat down near the fire. After a moment's silence, the Black Bear addressed the Little Panther:

"Are the chiefs of all the tribes of our nation collected on the island as ordered?"

"They are."

"When will they come to my *jacal*?"

"That depends on my father."

The Black Bear began smoking again silently. A long period was thus spent.

"Nothing new has happened during my absence?" the Black Bear asked, shaking out the ash.

"Three chiefs of the prairie Comanches have arrived."

"Wah!" the chief said. "Are they renowned warriors?"

"They have many wolfs' tails on their mocassins. They must be valiant."

The Black Bear nodded his head in affirmation.

"One of them, it is said, is the Jester," the Little Panther continued.

"Is my brother certain?" cried the chief."

"The Comanche warriors refused to give their names when they learned the absence of my father. They answered it was well, and that they would await his return."

"Good! they are chiefs. Where are they?"

"They are camping round a fire."

"Time is precious. My brother will warn the Apache chiefs that I await them at the council fire."

The Little Panther rose without replying, and quitted the *jacal*.

Shortly after, the chiefs made their appearance. They were ten in number; each had put on his best ornaments, and all wore their war paint. They entered silently, and ranged themselves round the fire, after saluting the great chief.

As soon as all the chiefs had assembled in the interior of the *toldo* a troop of Apache warriors drew up outside to keep off the curious. The Black Bear could not refrain from a movement of joy at the sight of all these men.

"My brothers are welcome," he said, inviting them by a sign to take seats. "I was awaiting them impatiently."

The chiefs bowed and sat down.

"Before all," said the Black Bear, when smoking was over, "I must give you an account of my mission. The Black Bear has completely fulfilled it; he has entered the hut of the white men; and when the hour arrives for him to lead his warriors there the Black Bear will know how to find the road again."

The chiefs bowed with satisfaction.

"This great cabin of the whites," the Black Bear continued, "is our only serious obstacle."

"The Yoris are dogs. The Apaches will give them petticoats," the Little Panther said, with a grin.

The Black Bear shook his head.

"The pale-faces of the great cabin are not Yoris," he said; "they are men. Nearly all of them have blue eyes, and hair of the colour of ripe maize; they are very brave."

"Does not my father know who these men are?" a chief inquired.

"The Black Bear does not know. He was told that they inhabited a country very far from here, towards the rising sun."

"Have these men no trees, no fruit, no buffaloes in their own country, that they come to steal ours?"

"The pale-faces are insatiable," the Black Bear replied. The pale-faces are jealous, and seek continually to rob and dispossess us; but the Apaches are brave warriors: they can defend their hunting-grounds from these vagabonds, who have come from the other side of the Great Salt Lake on the floating cabins of the *Great Medicine*."

The chiefs warmly applauded this harangue, which expressed so well the animosity with which they were animated against the white race.

e great nation of the Comanches of the Lakes, that which is called the of the Prairies, has deputed to our nation three renowned warriors. t please you, chiefs of my nation, to receive them.

y father is a very wise warrior," the Little Panther replied; "he can, ne likes, divine the most hidden thoughts in the heart of his enemies. he does will be well done."

Black Bear threw a glance round the assembly, as if to assure himself e Little Panther had truly expressed the general will. The members of uncil silently bowed their heads in acquiescence. The chief then said:

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nese words were pronounced with a majesty equal to that of an European itting in parliament.

Little Panther went out to execute the order he had received, and shortly ed, preceding the Comanche warriors. On their entry the Apache chiefs nd saluted them ceremoniously. The Comanches returned the salutation o less courtesy.

Comanche warriors were young and finely built; they had a martial g, a free glance, and thoughtful brow. Dressed in their national costume, eads proudly upraised, and hands stemmed in their sides, they had some- noble and loyal about them which aroused sympathy. One of them lly, the youngest of the three, must be a superior man, to judge by rances: the brilliancy of his glance, the elegance and majesty of his g, caused him to be recognised at the first glance as a chosen man.

name was the Jester; and, as might be guessed from the tuft of condor- rs through his war-lock, he was one of the principal chiefs of the nation. er an instant's delay the Black Bear took a step toward the Comanche , bowed to them, and holding out his right-hand palm upwards, said:

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"Good! My brother is a prudent chief. He will succeed; and he, what will he do?"

"He will see," said Black Bear, laying his hand on the Comanche's shoulder. "Let him act as a chief, and I promise him a glorious victory."

"Good!" the Comanche made answer. "My brother is the first of his nation. I go to rejoin my warriors."

"'Tis well; my brother has understood. To-morrow at the rising of the moon."

The Jester bowed, and the two chiefs separated, apparently the best of friends.

CHAPTER XII.

A WOMAN'S STRATAGEM.

THE next day at the rising of the moon, as had been agreed, the Jester ordered his detachment to set out. Presently a party of horsemen who had hurried onwards, threw lighted torches amid the shrubs, and in a few minutes an immense curtain of flames rose to the sky, and completely veiled the horizon. In less than half an hour all was consumed.

The Black Bear had not made a move. The traces left by the Comanches were, alas! very visible, for the country only that morning so lovely, rich, and luxuriant, was at present gloomy and desolate.

The Indians' plan would have met with perfect success, had other men than Belhumeur and his friends been on the route of the Indian army.

The Canadian was watching. At the first smoke that arose he understood the intention of the red-skins, and without losing a moment he sent off Eagle-head to the colony. Still, behind the fire, the Comanches were arriving at full speed. Night had completely set in when the Jester arrived in sight of the colony. He at once ambushed a portion of his men, placed himself at the head of the rest, and crawled toward the isthmus battery.

No one appeared: the glacis and entrenchments seemed abandoned. The Jester uttered his war-cry, rose suddenly, and bounding forward like a jaguar, crossed the entrenchment, followed by his warriors. But, at that moment a fearful discharge at point-blank range levelled more than one-half of the Indian detachment, while the survivors took to flight.

The Comanches had one great disadvantage—they possessed no fire-arms. The musketry decimated them, and they could only reply by firing their arrows, or by hurling their javelins. Finding that the French were on their guard, the Jester, desperate at the check, concealed his detachment under cover of the virgin forest, and resolved to wait for the Black Bear's signal.

Don Louis had followed Eagle-head. The Indian, after several turnings, led him almost opposite the isthmus battery to the entrance of a dense thicket.

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that you must be probably savagely hungry. Finish your meal."
Louis had finished eating he described fully the way in which he had
ut his mission.
hat is very good," Belhumeur said; "I believe that we can henceforth
ed about the safety of our countrymen, especially with the help of the
ns."
but where shall they be concealed?"
e that to Eagle-head. The chief knows this country thoroughly.
you say, chief?"
easy to hide one's self in the prairie," the chief answered laconically.
Don Martial remarked, "but there is one thing you forget."
t?"
e on the frontier, and have long been accustomed to Indian tactics.
ches will arrive, preceded by one vast sheet of flame, in the midst of
e shall struggle in vain, if we do not take the proper precautions.
t is it?"
ove! making off."
he pale-faces listen," Eagle-head observed. "The Rio Gila, like all
ge rivers, brings down so many dead trees, that at certain spots they
ly block up the passage; in time these trees press against each other
r branches become entwined; grass grows, to cement these immense
hich at a distance resemble islands, until a storm comes as a flood,
eaks up the raft."
I know that. I have seen frequent instances of it, chief," Belhumeur
These rafts at last grow to look so like islands that the man most
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Eagle-head glided along the ground, and Louis imitated him: in this way they entered the thicket. After about a quarter of an hour the Indian stopped.

"Let my brother look," he said.

They were in a small clearing, formed in the midst of an inextricable medley of branches and shrubs. Belhumeur and the two Mexicans were philosophically smoking while awaiting the return of the envoy.

"You are welcome," the Canadian said, so soon as he caught sight of him. "How do you like our camp? Charming, is it not? We are as safe here as in Quebec Cathedral."

During this flood of words, to which he only responded by a hearty pressure of the hand, Louis had comfortably seated himself by the side of his companions.

"But where are the horses?" he asked.

"Here, two paces from us."

"Very good. Shall we be able to get them so soon as we want them?"

"*Pardieu!*"

"The fact is we shall probably need them soon."

"Ah, ah! but," he added, checking himself, "I am chattering, and not noticing that you must be probably savagely hungry. Finish your meal."

When Louis had finished eating he described fully the way in which he had carried out his mission.

"All that is very good," Belhumeur said; "I believe that we can henceforth feel assured about the safety of our countrymen, especially with the help of the forty peons."

"Yes, but where shall they be concealed?"

"Leave that to Eagle-head. The chief knows this country thoroughly. What do you say, chief?"

"It is easy to hide one's self in the prairie," the chief answered laconically.

"Yes," Don Martial remarked, "but there is one thing you forget."

"What?"

"I live on the frontier, and have long been accustomed to Indian tactics. The Apaches will arrive, preceded by one vast sheet of flame, in the midst of which we shall struggle in vain, if we do not take the proper precautions.

"What is it?"

"By Jove! making off."

"Let the pale-faces listen," Eagle-head observed. "The Rio Gila, like all other large rivers, brings down so many dead trees, that at certain spots they completely block up the passage; in time these trees press against each other and their branches become entwined; grass grows, to cement these immense rafts, which at a distance resemble islands, until a storm comes as a flood, which breaks up the raft."

"Yes, I know that. I have seen frequent instances of it, chief," Belhumeur said. "These rafts at last grow to look so like islands that the man most accustomed to desert life is frequently deceived by them. I understand all the advantages your idea possesses for us; but how can we carry it out?"

"In the simplest way. The Indian's eye is good. Above the great lodge of the pale-faces, did not my brother notice an islet?"

"What you say is quite correct," Belhumeur exclaimed; "I can call the island to mind now."

"From the position it occupies there will be nothing to apprehend from fire," Louis remarked. "It will be extremely useful as an advanced post."

"We have not a moment to lose: we must take possession of it at once."

"Let us start, then, without further delay," the Tigrero said as he rose.

The others imitated him, and the five men left the clearing.

The Indian chief had not deceived them. With that infallible glance his countrymen possess, he had at once formed a correct opinion of the spot.

This islet (we will retain the name, though it was really only a raft) was covered with a close, strong herbage, about two yards in height, in the midst of which men and horses completely disappeared. When the reconnoissance was ended, Belhumeur and the two Mexicans installed themselves in the centre, while Louis and Eagle-head returned to the bank.

Don Martial did not care to accompany them. So near the colony he was afraid of being recognised by Don Sylva. Louis, after making him the offer to accompany them, pressed him no further. The truth was, that the count felt, without being able to explain it, a species of repulsion for this man.

Eagle-head and Louis, certain that the Black Bear had really retired, and left no spies on the prairie, thought it unnecessary to let the Mexicans take a long and wearisome ride before leading them to the hiding-place.

Meanwhile the news Don Louis had carried to the colony had turned everything topsy-turvy. Although, since the first foundation of the hacienda, the Indians had constantly tried to harass the French, this was really the first time they would have a serious contest with their ferocious enemies.

The Count de Lhorailles had with him about two hundred Dauph'yeers. These half bandits, half soldiers, were a singular mixture of all the nationalities peopling the two hemispheres, although the French supplied the largest factor.

The news of the attack premeditated by the Apaches was received by the garrison with shouts of joy and enthusiasm. It was an amusement for these adventurers to exchange shots, or rub the rust off a little, as they naïvely said in their picturesque language.

The count, therefore, had no need to recommend firmness to them; he was, on the contrary, obliged to repress their ardour.

As soon as the defensive preparations were made the count left the details to his two lieutenants, two old soldiers, on whom he believed he could count; then he thought of Blas Vasquez and his peons. The capataz, well instructed, put himself at the head of the squadron, and left the colony, rifle on thigh.

The count, Don Sylva, and the other inhabitants followed the party with an interest easy to comprehend, ready to help them if attacked. But nothing stirred in the prairie.

"I cannot at all understand the Indian tactics," Don Sylva muttered. "As they have allowed that party to pass so quietly, they must be planning some trick."

"We shall soon know what we have to expect," the count replied; "besides, we are ready to receive them. I am only sorry that Dona Anita should be here; not that she runs the slightest risk."

"Senor conde," the lady said, "fear nothing for me. I am a true Mexican, not one whom the slightest thing causes to faint. Often, in circumstances graver than these, I have heard the Apache war-yell echo in my ears, without, however, feeling alarm."

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After uttering these words with that contemptuous accent women know so well to employ to a man they do not love, Dona Anita passed by the count without deigning him a glance.

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Blas Vasquez, the capataz, had seen the birth of Dona Anita: his wife had been her nurse—that is, he was devoted to the young girl.

When Don Louis visited the hacienda the young lady was very curious as to the motive of his arrival. After the Frenchman's departure she asked coolly for information from the capataz, who saw no harm in giving it to her. The only thing no one could know, and which Dona Anita guessed with that heart instinct which never deceives, was the presence of the Tigrero.

On leaving her at Guaymas, Don Martial had said that he would constantly watch over her. After that, it is plain that he must have followed her. Had he done so (which she did not for a moment doubt), he must certainly be among the brave men who at that moment were devoting themselves to save her.

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"Don Blas," the girl said at last, "it is probable that if the colony is attacked, and when my father and Don Gaëtan no longer want you and your men, that you will receive orders to return to Guaymas."

"'Tis probable, senora," he said.

"In that case you will have no objection to do me a service?" she went on.

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"I do not wish to put your friendship to such a rude trial, my good Blas."

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"Oh, senorita!" he said reproachfully.

"No; I have a way to procure them more easily."

"Ah! Very good. Let us see."

"A renowned Tigrero arrived at Guaymas a few days back."

"Don Martial Asuzena?" he quickly interrupted her.

"Yes. Well, I heard that he has brought back from his last hunt on the western prairies some magnificent jaguar skins, which, I have no doubt, he would be willing to sell at a fair price."

"I am certain of it."

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"Pardon me, my friend, you have so much to think of, that a trifle might easily slip your memory."

"Well, that is possible; so perhaps you have acted wisely."

"But stay, another word. Do not say anything to my father. You know how kind he is; he would want to make me a present of them, and I wish to pay for the skins out of my own purse."

The capataz began laughing at the joke. The worthy man was delighted at sharing a secret with his darling child.

"It is settled," he said; "I will be dumb."

The girl gave him a friendly nod and withdrew. What was the meaning of the note?

Blas Vasquez, on quitting the colony, struck the Guaymas road, and made his troop go at a sharp trot. He had scarce lost sight of the colony, and entered the tall grass, when two men leaping into the middle of the path, checked their horses about twenty paces ahead of him. One of them was an Indian; the other the capataz recognised at a glance as the man who had come to the hacienda that morning. Vasquez advancing alone said,—

"By what accident do I meet you here, senor? You are still far from the meeting-place you indicated."

"We are so," was the reply; "but as we found no trail in the prairie we thought it useless to give you a long journey. I have been sent to conduct you to the ambush."

"You did right. Have we far to go?"

"No, hardly a quarter of an hour's ride. We are going to that islet, which you can see by standing in your stirrups," he added.

"Be good enough to serve as our guide, Senor Francès: we will follow you."

The detachment set out again. As Don Louis had stated, within a quarter of an hour the capataz and the peons were encamped on the islet with the five adventurers, well masked by grass and mangroves.

The first person Blas perceived was Don Martial, the Tigrero. At the sight of him he could hardly refrain from a movement of surprise.

"*Caspita!*" he exclaimed, with a loud laugh; "the meeting is curious."

"Why so?" the Mexican asked, rather annoyed by this recognition.

"Are you not Don Martial Asuzena?"

"Yes," he replied, more and more restless.

"My faith! But I did not expect to find you here."

"Explain yourself, sir, I beg."

"My young mistress gave me a message for you."

"What do you say?" the Tigrero exclaimed, his heart beginning to palpitate.

"What I say, nothing else. Dona Anita wishes to buy two jaguar skins of of you, it appears."

Don Martial regarded him with such an air of amazement that the capataz began again laughing heartily. This laughter aroused the young man; made him conjecture there was some mystery in the affair.

"'Tis true," he said, as if trying to remember, "I fancy I can call to mind some time back——"

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The capataz handed it to him. Don Martial tore it from his hands, broke the seal with trembling fingers, and devoured it with his eyes. When he had finished reading it he concealed it in his bosom.

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A NIGHT JOURNEY.

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The two men marched on side by side silently, allowing the reins to hang on their horses' heads, and each indulging in his own reflections. Still Cucharès remarked that Don Martial, instead of seeking the cover of the forest, obstinately followed the river bank.

The darkness grew rapidly denser around them; distant objects began to be lost in the masses of shadow on the horizon, and they soon found themselves in complete obscurity. For some time the lepero tried, by coughing or uttering exclamations, to attract his comrade's attention, though unsuccessfully.

"Don Martial," he said at last.

"Well," the latter replied, carelessly.

"Do you not think it is time for us to stop a little?"

"But we have not arrived yet."

"Then we are going somewhere?"

"Why else should we have left our friends?"

"That's true. Where are we going, though?"

"You will soon know."

"I confess that I should be glad of it."

They had now left the hill of Guetzalli about two musket-shots behind them, and reached a sort of creek, which, through the windings of the river, was almost parallel with the back of the hacienda, whose gloomy and imposing mass rose before them.

"We have arrived," Don Martial said.

"At last!" the lepero muttered with a sigh of satisfaction.

"I mean to say," the Tigrero went on, "that the easiest part of our expedition is ended."

"We are making an expedition, then?"

"By Jove! do you fancy, then, my good fellow, that I am marching for amusement?"

"That surprised me, too."

"Now our expedition will commence in reality."

"Good!"

"I must warn you, however, that it is rather dangerous; however, I counted on you."

"Thanks," Cucharès answered, making a grimace. The truth is, the lepero would have preferred that his friend had not given him this proof of confidence.

"We are going there," Don Martial continued, and he extended his arm in the direction of the river.

"Where then? to the hacienda?"

"Yes."

"Do you believe we shall reach the hacienda without being discovered?"

"We will try it at any rate."

"But we shall not succeed, those demons of Frenchmen will take us for savages, and shoot us."

"It is a risk to run."

"Thanks! I prefer remaining here. Go where you please, but I stay here."

The Tigrero could not suppress a smile.

"The danger is not so great as you suppose," he said. "We are expected at the hacienda by some one, who will doubtlessly have moved the sentinels."

"That is possible, but I do not care to try the experiment, for a bullet never pardons."

The Tigrero made no reply; he did not seem even to have heard his companion's remark. His mind was elsewhere. With his body bent forward, he was listening. During the last few minutes the desert had assumed a singular appearance. It woke up. All sorts of noises were heard from the thickets and clearings. Animals of every description rushed from the covert, and madly passed the two men without noticing them. The birds, startled from their first

sleep, rose uttering shrill cries, and circled in the air. In the river might be seen the outlines of wild beasts swimming vigorously to reach the other bank.

At intervals dry crackling sounds and hoarse murmurs, like those of rising water, broke the silence, and became with each moment more intense. On the extreme verge of the horizon a large band of bright red, growing wider from minute to minute, spread over the scene a purple and gold glare, which gave it a fantastic appearance.

"Halloh! what is happening now?" the lepero suddenly exclaimed. "Look at our horses, Don Martial."

In fact, the noble beasts, with neck outstretched and ears laid back, were breathing heavily.

"*Caspita!*" the Tigrero said calmly, "they smell the fire, that is all."

"What fire? Do you think the prairie is on fire?"

"Of course. You can see it as well as I, if you like."

"Hem! what is the meaning of that?"

"Not much. It is one of the ordinary Indian tricks."

"I beg your pardon, I am not a wood-ranger. I confess to you that all this alarms me greatly."

"You are a child," Don Martial answered him, laughingly. "It is evident that the Indians have fired the prairie to conceal their numbers. You will soon hear their war-cry. By remaining here you run three risks—of being roasted, scalped, or killed: three most unpleasant things. You had better come with me. Come, dismount; the fire is gaining on us; soon we shall not have the chance.

"I will follow you," the lepero replied in a mournful voice. "I must. I was mad to leave Guaymas, where I was so happy—where I lived without working—to come and thrust my head into such wasps' nests."

"Bah! bah! people always say that. Make haste; we have no time to lose."

Don Martial and the lepero entered the water; and their noble animals, impelled by their instinct, hurried in the direction of the other bank.

The Gila, at this period of the year swollen by the rains which fall in the sierra, had a width double of what it was in the summer. At that period its current becomes strong, and frequently dangerous through its rapidity; but our adventurers reached the other bank in a comparatively short period.

"Eh!" Cucharès observed at the moment the horses struck land, "did you not tell me, Don Martial, that we were going to the hacienda? We are not taking the road, I fancy."

"You fancy wrong. Remember in the desert a man must appear to turn his back on what he wishes to reach."

"Which means?"

"That we are going to hobble our horses, and then go straight to the hacienda."

The Tigrero immediately dismounted, led his horse under the shelter of the great trees, took off its bridle, hobbled it carefully, and returned to the bank.

The worthy lepero had at length formed an heroic resolve. Persuaded that he was lost, he yielded himself to the guidance of his lucky or unlucky star with that half-timid fanaticism which can only be compared with that found among the Easterns.

As we have said, this side of the river was plunged in shade and silence, and the adventurers were temporarily protected from any danger.

"Stay," the lepero again remarked, "it is a good distance; I can never swim it."

"Patience. We shall find, I am certain, if we take the trouble to look, means to shorten it," and the Tigrero pointed out a small canoe.

"The colonists often come here to fish," he continued; "they have several canoes concealed like this at various spots. Do you know how to manage a paddle?"

"Yes, when I am not afraid."

Don Martial looked at him for a few seconds, then said in a sharp voice:

"Listen, Cucharès, my friend: I have no time to discuss the matter with you; I have extremely serious reasons for acting as I am now doing. I want on your part hearty co-operation, so take warning in time. You know me; at the first suspicious movement I will blow out your brains as I would a coyote's."

The lepero understood—he resigned himself. In a few minutes the canoe was ready, and the two men in it.

At a signal from Don Martial, Cucharès took up the paddles, and they started. The fire was rapidly retiring in a western direction while continuing its ravages. The canoe advanced slowly and cautiously.

Cucharès, pale as a corpse, with hair standing on end, and eyes enlarged by terror, rowed on frenziedly, while recommending his soul fervently to all the numberless saints of the Spanish calendar.

In fact, the position was a grave one, and it required all the resolution with which the Tigrero was endowed to keep him from sharing the terror which had seized on his comrade. The further they advanced the greater the obstacles grew. Obliged to make continued turns, in consequence of the trees that barred their passage, they only turned on their own axis, as it were, forced to pass the same spot a dozen times, and watch on all sides at once.

For about two hours they continued this wearying navigation; but they insensibly approached the hacienda, whose sombre mass stood out from the star-lit sky. Suddenly a terrible cry, raised by a considerable number of voices, filled the air, and a discharge of artillery and musketry roared like thunder.

"Holy Virgin!" Cucharès exclaimed, "we are lost!"

"On the contrary," the Tigrero said, "we are saved. The Indians are attacking the colony; all the French are at the entrenchments, and no one will dream of watching us. One more good pull!"

"May God hear you!" the lepero muttered.

"Ah! the attack is serious, it appears. All the better. The harder they fight over there the less attention will be paid to us. Let us get on."

Don Martial looked searchingly around; all was silent in this part of the river. There was no reason for supposing that they had been seen. The Tigrero bent over his companion.

"That will do," he whispered; "we have arrived."

"What! arrived?" the lepero repeated, with a frightened air. "We are still a long way off."

"No; at the spot where we now are you have nothing to fear. Remain in the canoe, and wait for me."

"What; are you going away?"

"Yes; keep a good watch. If you notice anything new, you will give the cry of the water-hen twice; you understand?"

"Perfectly; but if a serious danger threatened us, what ought I to do?"

"What danger can threaten you here?"

"I do not know; but the Indians are fiends incarnate; with them you must be prepared for anything."

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He had not long to wait.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN INDIAN TRICK.

We have already seen in what way the Jester began hostilities. The Black Bear had a scheme which he had been ripening for a long time, though not possessing the means to put it in execution ; but knowing where to obtain the information he needed, he went to Guaymas. The Tigrero, by proposing to him to enter the colony as a guide, had unsuspectingly supplied him with the pretext he sought.

Like all the redskins, Black Bear desired to have a white woman in his lodge. Fatality, by bringing him across Dona Anita, had suddenly re-enkindled the secret hope he entertained. It must not be thought that the Black Bear loved the Spanish maiden; no, he wanted a white squaw, that was all. He was simply humiliated by the knowledge that the other chiefs of his nation had slaves of that colour, while he alone had none.

The Black Bear, standing with his principal warriors on the point of the island, remained silent, with his arms crossed on his chest, his eyes fixed on vacancy.

"My brother, the Jester, is an experienced chief," he said at last, "and a faithful ally. He has fulfilled his mission. He is now smoking the pale-face dogs. What the Comanches have begun we will finish."

"The Black Bear is the first warrior of his nation," the little Panther replied.

The Indian sachem smiled at this flattery.

"If the Comanches are antelopes, the Apaches are otters; they can, if they please, swim in the water, or march on land. The pale-faces have lived."

The warriors bowed. The Black Bear continued, after a moment's silence :—

"What do the Apache warriors care for the fire tubes of the pale-faces? Have they not long, barbed arrows and intrepid hearts? My brothers will follow me; we will take the scalps of these pale dogs."

Shouts of joy and enthusiasm greeted these words.

"The river is covered with numerous trunks of trees: my sons are not squaws to fatigue themselves uselessly. They will place themselves on these dead trees, and drift with the current. Let my brothers prepare. The Black Bear will set out at the sixth hour. Two hundred warriors will follow Black Bear."

The chiefs bowed respectfully before the sachem, and left him alone. He wrapped himself up in his buffalo robe, sat down by the fire, lit his calumet, and remained silent, with his eyes fixed on the gradually-extending prairie fire.

The island in which the Apache chief had formed his camp was at no great distance from the French colony. The project of floating down had no very great danger for these men, accustomed to every sort of bodily exercise, and who swam like fish.

The Black Bear was so convinced of the success of this stratagem, that he only took with him two hundred chosen men.

Night sets in rapidly and suddenly in countries where the twilight does not last longer than lightning flash. Soon all became darkness, save that, in

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Still this navigation, so essentially eccentric, offered grave inconveniences. The Indians, without paddles, were obliged to follow the stream, only succeeding in holding on by extraordinary efforts. Like all wood floating at the mercy of the waves, the trees continually revolved. There was another difficulty, too: it was absolutely necessary to keep in the water, so as to give the trees the proper direction and make them reach the colony, instead of following the current in the middle of the stream.

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But presently the Black Bear, who was at the head of the party, and whose piercing eye incessantly surveyed the scene around, noticed a canoe a few yards ahead gracefully dancing on the water, and attached to a dead stump.

This canoe at once appeared suspicious to the cautious Indian. It did not seem natural to him. After carefully examining it, he stooped over to the Little Panther, who hung on the same tree in readiness to execute his orders, and, placing his knife between his teeth, the chief unloosed his hold, and dived.

He rose again near the canoe, seized it boldly, pulled it over, and leaped in right on Cucharès' chest, and seized him by the throat.

"Wah;" the Indian exclaimed with surprise on recognising him. "What is my brother doing here?"

"You see," the lepero answered, "I am sleeping."

"Wah! my brother was afraid of the fire."

"Quite right, chief; you guessed it the first time. I *was* afraid of the fire."

"Good!" the Apache continued, "my brother is not alone. Where is the Great Buffalo?"

"Eh? I do not know the Great Buffalo, chief. I don't even know whom you are talking about."

"All the pale-faces have a forked tongue. Why does not my brother speak the truth?"

"I do not understand you."

"The Black Bear can speak the language of his nation, but he knows badly that of the Yoris."

"I did not mean that. You express yourself excellently in Castilian, but you are speaking of a person I do not know."

"Is that possible?" the Indian said. "My brother does not know his general?"

"Oh! now I understand; you are talking of Don Martial. Yes, certainly I know him."

"Good!" the chief replied; "I knew that I was not mistaken. Why is my brother not with him?"

"Probably because I am here," the lepero said with a grin.

"That is true; but as I am in a hurry, and my brother does not wish to answer me, I am going to kill him."

Saying this in a tone which admitted of no tergiversation, the Black Bear raised his knife. The lepero understood that, if he did not obey the Indian, he was lost, and his hesitation ceased as if by enchantment.

"What do you want of me?" he said.

"Where is the Great Buffalo?"

"There," he said, pointing in the direction of the hacienda.

"I understand. Are they together?"

"They ought to be so, as she called him to her."

"Will he come back alone?"

"I do not know."

The Indian fixed a glance on him, as if trying to read his very heart. The lepero was calm: he had honestly told all he knew.

"Good!" the chief continued the next moment. Did not the Great Buffalo agree on a signal with his friend?"

"He did."

"What is that signal?"

At this question a singular idea crossed Cucharès' brain. The leperos belong to a strange race, which only bears a likeness to the Neapolitan lazzaroni.

Cucharès was a perfect personification of this eccentric race. Though the Apache chief's knife was scarcely two inches from his breast, and he knew that his ferocious enemy would show him no mercy, he suddenly resolved to play him a trick.

"The chief wishes to know the signal?" he said.

"Yes," the Apache replied.

Cucharès, with the utmost coolness, imitated the cry of the water-hen.

"Silence!" the Black Bear exclaimed; "it is not that."

"Pardon," the lepero replied with a grin; "perhaps I gave it badly," and he repeated it.

The Indian, roused by his enemy's impudence, rushed upon him, resolved to finish him with his knife; but, blinded by his fury, he calculated badly, and gave too violent an oscillation to the canoe. The light bark, whose equilibrium was disturbed, turned over, and the two men rolled into the river.

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"Fire!" a stentorian voice suddenly commanded.

A frightful discharge instantly followed. The Apaches responded by howlings of rage, and themselves surprised by the men they had hoped to surprise, rushed upon them, brandishing their weapons.

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CHAPTER XV.

SET A THIEF TO CATCH A THIEF.

After the departure of the two Mexicans, Belhumeur and his friends remained silent. The Canadian played with the charcoal that had fallen from the brazier on to the ground; in fact, he was lost in thought. Don Louis was watching with distraught air the sparkles which crackled, glistened, and went out. Eagle-head, alone of the party, wrapped up in his buffalo robe, smoked his calumet with stoicism.

"Wah!" Eagle-head suddenly said, withdrawing from his lips the tube of his calumet, and bending forward, while bidding his comrades keep silence.

"What is it?" Belhumeur at length asked.

"Fire!" the other replied slowly. "The Apaches are coming: they are burning the prairie before them."

"What?" Belhumeur exclaimed. "I see no trace of fire."

"No, not yet; but the fire is coming—I can smell it."

"Hum! if the chief says so it must be true. What is to be done?"

"We have nothing to fear from fire here," the capataz observed.

"We have not," Don Louis exclaimed; "but the hacienda?"

"Not more than we," Belhumeur replied. "See, all the trees have been cut down, and rooted up to too great a distance from the colony for the fire to reach it."

"Still I am of this caballero's opinion," the capataz said; "we should do well to warn the hacienda."

"There is something even more urgent to do," Don Louis said, "and that is to send off a clever scout to learn positively with whom we have to deal."

"One does not prevent the other," Belhumeur remarked. "Eagle-head will reconnoitre the foe, while we proceed to the hacienda."

"All of us?" the capataz observed.

"No; your position here is secure. Don Louis and I will proceed alone to the colony. Remember that you must not show yourselves under any pretext. Whatever may happen, await the order for acting."

"Go, caballeros; I will not betray your confidence."

"Good! Now to work. You will find us at the hacienda if you learn anything of importance."

Upon this these men, so long accustomed to act without losing precious time in useless words, separated; Don Louis and Belhumeur returning to the main land on the side of the hacienda, while the chief rode off in the opposite direction. Blas Vasquez remained alone with his peons.

We will, for a moment, leave Don Louis and his friend, to follow Eagle-head.

The mission the chief had undertaken was anything rather than easy; but the Eagle-head was a man of experience, thoroughly versed in Indian tricks. After leaving his companions, he walked quietly down to the water's edge, and when he reached the spot where he intended to cross the river his plan was all arranged in his head.

The chief, instead of passing to that side of the river by which the enemy would come, preceded by the conflagration, crossed to the other. So soon as he reached the bank he allowed his horse a few moments for breathing; then

at a bound on to the panther skin that served as his saddle, he galloped peed in the direction of the enemy's camp. This furious race lasted rs. At the end of these two hours the chief found himself just opposite t advanced point of the island, where the Apaches were at this moment l in collecting the drift-wood they meant to use in the surprise of the Eagle-head stopped.

after careful reflection, the chief resolved to advance a few paces fur- d re-cross the river at the point opposite this island. However, before g out this plan, a sudden inspiration flashed across his mind. He dis- d, hid his horse in a thicket, laid aside his rifle and buffalo robe; then tempting to pierce the surrounding gloom, he stretched himself on the and crawled to the river's bank. He gently entered the water, and ng, proceeded to the island.

t the instant he landed, and was about to rise, an almost imperceptible mote his ear. Eagle-head plunged again, and retired from the bank on e had been on the point of landing. Suddenly, at the moment he rose urface to take in a fresh supply of air, he saw two burning eyes flashing im; he received a violent blow on the chest, and felt a powerful hand is throat as in a vice.

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e-head found himself unexpectedly in the very midst of the fugitives. each man was too anxious about his own safety to have time to notice d the chief profited by it to turn aside and step behind a rock. But strange thing happened. The chief had scarce escaped from the fugi- nd examined them for a moment, ere a strange smile played on his lips: red his horse, and bounded into the very midst of the Indians, uttering shrill and peculiar cry. At this cry the Indians stopped in their flight,

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Still, after careful reflection, the chief resolved to advance a few paces further, and re-cross the river at the point opposite this island. However, before carrying out this plan, a sudden inspiration flashed across his mind. He dismounted, hid his horse in a thicket, laid aside his rifle and buffalo robe; then after attempting to pierce the surrounding gloom, he stretched himself on the ground, and crawled to the river's bank. He gently entered the water, and swimming, proceeded to the island.

But at the instant he landed, and was about to rise, an almost imperceptible sound smote his ear. Eagle-head plunged again, and retired from the bank on which he had been on the point of landing. Suddenly, at the moment he rose to the surface to take in a fresh supply of air, he saw two burning eyes flashing before him; he received a violent blow on the chest, and felt a powerful hand clutch his throat as in a vice.

Then a horrible and silent struggle commenced in the river—a sinister struggle, in which each sought to kill his adversary, without thinking to repel his attacks. A few seconds later, and a head appeared above the water, casting startled glances around.

At the sight of his enemy's corpse the victor indulged in a diabolic smile; he swam up to him, seized him by his war-lock, and swimming with one hand, dragged the body to the main land.

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The Indian had divined the Apache's tactics; the attack of which he had been so nearly the victim revealed to him the stratagem they designed. It was unnecessary for him to push his investigations on the island further.

The few minutes' rest he had granted his horse would have been sufficient to restore all its vigour. The chief might have returned to his friends, but he determined to carry out the adventure to the end.

He plucked a few leaves to stop the blood from a slight wound he had received in his left arm, fastened them on with a piece of bark, and rode his horse once more into the river.

The fire kindled by the Indians had not caused such ravages as might be supposed. The grass had burned rapidly, producing what the incendiaries desired —a large quantity of smoke, but scarcely heating the ground, which had allowed the red-skins to march rapidly on the colony.

Owing to his headlong speed, and the few hours those who had preceded him had been compelled to lose, the chief arrived almost simultaneously with them before the hacienda; that is to say, he came up with them at the moment when, after making a futile assault on the isthmus battery, they fled, pursued by a shower of grape, which decimated their ranks.

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and rushing from all sides toward the man who uttered it, they ranged themselves tumultuously round the chief.

The Eagle-head looked haughtily at the crowd that surrounded him.

"Wah!" he at length said. "Have the Comanches become timid antelopes, that they fly like Apache dogs before the bullets of the pale-faces?"

"Eagle-head! Eagle-head!" the warriors shouted with joy mingled with shame.

"Why have my sons left the hunting-grounds of the Del Norte? Are they the bloodhounds of the Apaches?"

A suppressed murmur ran through the ranks at this cruel reproach.

"A sachem has spoken," Eagle-head continued sharply. "Is there no one to answer him?"

A warrior then broke through the ranks of the Comanches, and approached Eagle-head.

"The Jester is a chief," he said in a gentle and harmonious voice.

Eagle-head's face was unwrinkled—his features instantaneously lost their expression of fury.

"Och!" he said, "my heart is joyous at seeing my son, the Jester. The warriors will camp here while the two sachems hold a council."

And making an imperious sign to the chief, he withdrew with him.

"Let us hold a council," the chief said, as he sat down on a stone, and signed to the Jester to take a place by his side. The latter obeyed without reply, and Eagle-head spoke in a slow and accentuated voice.

"The Eagle-head is a renowned warrior in his nation," he said. "Eagle-head acted as a father to the Jester; he taught him to tame a horse, pierce with his arrows the rapid antelope, or to stifle in his arms the mighty bear. Eagle-head loves the Jester, who is the son of his third wife's sister. Eagle-head gave a place at the council-fire to the Jester; he made a chief of him; and when he went away from the villages of his nation he said to him, 'My son will command my warriors; he will lead them to hunt, to fish, and to war.' Are these words true?"

"My father's words are true," the chief answered.

"Why, then, has my son allied himself with the enemies of his nation?"

The chief let his head fall in confusion.

"Why, without consulting the man who has ever aided him, has he undertaken an unjust war?"

"An unjust war?" the chief remarked.

"Yes, as it is carried on in concert with the enemies of our nation."

"The Apaches are red-skins."

"The Apaches are cowardly and thievish dogs."

"But the pale-faces are the enemies of the Indians."

"Those whom my son attacked are the friends of Eagle-head."

"My father will pardon the warrior: he did not know it."

"If the Jester really was ignorant of it, is he ready to repair the fault he has committed?"

"The Jester has three hundred warriors beneath his totem. Eagle-head has come: they are his."

"Good! I see that the Jester is still my well-beloved son. With what chief has he made alliance? It cannot be with the Black Bear?"

"A cloud had passed over the mind of the Jester; wisdom deserted him; he has allied himself with the Black Bear."

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"Good!" a voice replied in Spanish from the inside. "Wait a moment; I will send to him."

The two Comanche warriors bowed, crossed their hands on their breast, and waited.

Don Louis and Belhumeur had had a long conversation with Don Sylva and the count, in which they revealed to them in what way they had learnt that the Indians meant to attack them; the name of the man who had informed them so correctly; and his singular conduct, in that, after having in a measure compelled them to mix themselves up in a dangerous affair which did not at all concern them, he had suddenly abandoned them.

This news had a lively effect on the two hearers; Don Sylva especially could not repress a movement of anger on learning that this person was no other than Don Martial. He guessed at once the Tigrero's object—that he hoped to carry off Dona Anita during the confusion.

Belhumeur then explained to the count the position in which he had placed the capataz and his peons, and the mission Eagle-head had undertaken, the result of which he would probably soon come to the hacienda to tell. The count warmly thanked the two men who, without knowing him, rendered him such eminent services, and then went to give his lieutenant orders to warn him so soon as an Indian presented himself.

Don Sylva retired to inspect the sentries stationed at the rear of the hacienda. When the Comanches attacked the isthmus, the French, put on their guard, received them so warmly that in the very first attack the Indians recognised the futility of their attempt, and retired in disorder.

Monsieur de Lhorailles was talking with the two visitors, when Lieutenant Leroux entered the room where the three men were conversing.

"What do you want?" the count asked him.

"Captain," he answered, "two Indians are waiting at the trench for permission to enter."

They proceeded to the battery.

"Well?" the count said.

"Well, sir, one of these men is certainly Eagle-head; but I do not know the other."

"And your advice is——"

"To let them come in. As this Indian comes in the company of Eagle-head, he can only be a friend."

"Be it so, then."

The count gave a signal; the drawbridge was lowered, and the two chiefs entered. The Indian sachems saluted all present with that native dignity that distinguishes them, and then Eagle-head gave an account of his mission. The Frenchman listened to him with an attention mingled with admiration, not only for the skill he had displayed, but also the courage of which he had given proof.

"And now," the chief continued on ending his report, "the Jester has understood

the error into which a blind hatred threw him; he breaks the alliance he formed with the Apaches, and is resolved to obey in all respects his father Eagle-head, in order to repent his fault. Eagle-head is a sachem—his word is granite. He places three hundred Comanche warriors at the disposition of his brothers the pale-faces."

The count looked hesitatingly at the Canadian. Belhumeur shrugged his shoulders imperceptibly.

"I accept," he finally replied.

"Good!" Eagle-head replied; "all shall be done as my brother desires."

The two chiefs took leave and withdrew. Belhumeur then explained to the count the arrangements he had made with the Comanche sachem.

"Hang it!" De Lhorailles said, "I confess that I have not the slightest confidence in the Indians."

"You do not know the Comanches; and, above all, you do not know Eagle-head."

"Act, then, as you please. I am too much indebted to you to thwart your projects."

Belhumeur went himself to advise the capataz of the change effected in the defensive measures. The Jester and one hundred and fifty warriors, accompanied by the forty peons, at once crossed the river, and ambushed themselves on the opposite bank in a clump of mangroves, ready to appear at the first signal. The Frenchmen, with Eagle-head and a second troop of Indians, were left to defend the isthmus, a point where they were almost certain of being attacked. They had not long to wait; and we have seen in what fashion the Black Bear was received.

The Apache chief was brave as a lion; his warriors were picked men. The collision was terrible; the red-skins did not give way an inch. Incessantly repulsed, incessantly they returned to the charge, fighting hand to hand with the French, who, in spite of their bravery, their discipline, and superiority of weapons, could not rout them. The combat had degenerated into a horrible carnage, in which the fighters clutched each other, stabbing and mangling without loosing hold.

But a few minutes later the war-cry of the Comanches was heard, strident and terrible; and the red-skin warriors bounded like jaguars on the Apaches, swinging their clubs and long lances. At first the Black Bear fancied assistance had arrived for him, and that the colony was in the power of the allies; but this hope did not endure a second. Then demoralization seized on the Apaches; they hesitated, and suddenly turning their backs, rushed into the river, leaving on the battle-field more than two-thirds of their comrades.

The colonists contented themselves with firing a few rounds of canister at the fugitives, feeling certain they would not escape the ambuscade prepared for them. The victory of the French was complete. For a long time the colony, through this glorious achievement, was protected from the attacks of the red-skins.

When the combat was ended, people sought in vain in every direction for Don Sylva and his daughter: both had disappeared, and no one knew how.

"Don Sylva and his daughter had been carried off by the Black Bear!" everybody said.

When the count, after repeated researches, was compelled to allow that the hacendero and his daughter had really disappeared without leaving the slightest trace, he gave way to all the violence of his character, vowed a terrible hatred against the Apaches, and swore to pursue them, without truce or mercy, until he found her whom he considered his wife.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CASA GRANDE OF MOCTECUZOMA.

remote period when the Aztecs, guided by the finger of God, marched ithout knowing it, to conquer the plateau of Ahanuac, of which they lly made the powerful kingdom of Mexico, although their eyes were tly turned toward this unknown land, the permanent object of their ney frequently stopped during their migration, as if fatigue had sud- erpowered them.

so many centuries have passed away, when their founders have eter- sappeared from the surface of the globe, the imposing ruins of these cattered over a space of more than a thousand leagues, still excite the ion of travellers.

nost singular of these ruins is indubitably that known by the name of a Grande of Moctecuzoma, which rises about two miles from the banks of the Rio Gila, in an uncultivated and uninhabited plain, on the the terrible sand desert known as the Del Norte.

ouse is a perfect square, turned to the four cardinal points. All around s, indicating an *enciente* inclosing not only a house, but other buildings, which are perfectly distinct: for a little to the rear is a building hav- or above, and divided into several parts. The edifice is built of earth, far as can be seen, with mud walls; it had three stories above the but the internal carpentry has long ago disappeared. The rooms, five er on each floor, were only lighted, so far as we can judge from the by the doors, and round holes made in the walls facing to the north h. Through these openings the man Amer (*el hombre Amargo*, as the call the Aztec sovereign) looked at the sun, on its rising and setting, to

al, now nearly dry, ran from the river, and served to supply the city er.

ndians carefully avoid these sinister stations, from which a superstitious r which they cannot account, keeps them aloof.

n the ruins all was noise and light, but outside all was shadow and

ight slipped away; the moon had already traversed two-thirds of her the badly-tended braseros went out one after another; the old alone continued to gleam through the darkness like an ill-omened e.

s moment the sharp and regular sound of a horse trotting on the sand d in the distance. The sentinels stationed at the entrance of the ised their heads, and looked in the direction whence the noise of foot- s audible.

eman appeared at the corner of the road leading to the ruins. The paying but little heed to what he saw, continued to advance boldly he house. He passed the ruined wall, and on arriving within ten paces entries, dismounted, threw the bridle on his horse's neck, and walked m step toward the sentries, who awaited him silent and motionless. n he was but about two swords' lengths from the party all the

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The Apache chief was brave as a lion; his warriors were picked men. The co lision was terrible; the red-skins did not give way an inch. Incessantly repulse incessantly they returned to the charge, fighting hand to hand with the French, wh in spite of their bravery, their discipline, and superiority of weapons, could not ro them. The combat had degenerated into a horrible carnage, in which the fighte clutched each other, stabbing and mangling without loosing hold.

But a few minutes later the war-cry of the Comanches was heard, strident an terrible; and the red-skin warriors bounded like jaguars on the Apaches, swingin their clubs and long lances. At first the Black Bear fancied assistance had arrive for him, and that the colony was in the power of the allies; but this hope did n endure a second. Then demoralization seized on the Apaches; they hesitated, an suddenly turning their backs, rushed into the river, leaving on the battle-fie more than two-thirds of their comrades.

The colonists contented themselves with firing a few rounds of canister at th fugitives, feeling certain they would not escape the ambuscade prepared for them The victory of the French was complete. For a long time the colony, through th glorious achievement, was protected from the attacks of the red-skins.

When the combat was ended, people sought in vain in every direction for Do Sylva and his daughter: both had disappeared, and no one knew how.

"Don Sylva and his daughter had been carried off by the Black Bear!" every body said.

When the count, after repeated researches, was compelled to allow that the hacien dero and his daughter had really disappeared without leaving the slightest trace, h gave way to all the violence of his character, vowed a terrible hatred against th Apaches, and swore to pursue them, without truce or mercy, until he found he whom he considered his wife.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CASA GRANDE OF MOCTECUZOMA.

At the remote period when the Aztecs, guided by the finger of God, marched forth, without knowing it, to conquer the plateau of Ahanuac, of which they eventually made the powerful kingdom of Mexico, although their eyes were constantly turned toward this unknown land, the permanent object of their greed, they frequently stopped during their migration, as if fatigue had suddenly overpowered them.

After so many centuries have passed away, when their founders have eternally disappeared from the surface of the globe, the imposing ruins of these cities, scattered over a space of more than a thousand leagues, still excite the admiration of travellers.

The most singular of these ruins is indubitably that known by the name of the Casa Grande of Moctecuzoma, which rises about two miles from the muddy banks of the Rio Gila, in an uncultivated and uninhabited plain, on the skirt of the terrible sand desert known as the Del Norte.

The house is a perfect square, turned to the four cardinal points. All around are walls, indicating an *enciente* inclosing not only a house, but other buildings, traces of which are perfectly distinct: for a little to the rear is a building having a floor above, and divided into several parts. The edifice is built of earth, and, as far as can be seen, with mud walls; it had three stories above the ground, but the internal carpentry has long ago disappeared. The rooms, five in number on each floor, were only lighted, so far as we can judge from the remains, by the doors, and round holes made in the walls facing to the north and south. Through these openings the man Amer (*el hombre Amargo*, as the Indians call the Aztec sovereign) looked at the sun, on its rising and setting, to salute it.

A canal, now nearly dry, ran from the river, and served to supply the city with water.

The Indians carefully avoid these sinister stations, from which a superstitious terror, for which they cannot account, keeps them aloof.

Within the ruins all was noise and light, but outside all was shadow and silence.

The night slipped away; the moon had already traversed two-thirds of her course; the badly-tended braseros went out one after another; the old mansion alone continued to gleam through the darkness like an ill-omened lighthouse.

At this moment the sharp and regular sound of a horse trotting on the sand re-echoed in the distance. The sentinels stationed at the entrance of the house raised their heads, and looked in the direction whence the noise of footsteps was audible.

A horseman appeared at the corner of the road leading to the ruins. The stranger, paying but little heed to what he saw, continued to advance boldly toward the house. He passed the ruined wall, and on arriving within ten paces of the sentries, dismounted, threw the bridle on his horse's neck, and walked with a firm step toward the sentries, who awaited him silent and motionless. But when he was but about two swords' lengths from the party all the

lances were suddenly levelled at his breast, and a hoarse voice shouted, "Halt!"

The stranger stopped without a remark.

"Who are you? what do you want?"

"I am a *costeno*. I have taken a long journey to see your chief," the stranger said.

By the pale and flickering rays of the moon the sentry tried in vain to distinguish the stranger's features.

"What is your name?" he asked, in an ill-tempered tone, when he recognised that all his efforts were useless.

"What need of that? Your chief does not know me, and my name will tell him nothing."

"Possibly so, but that concerns yourself. Keep your incognito if you think proper; but our captain is at this moment supping with his officers, and certainly will not put himself out to speak with a stranger."

The man could not conceal a sharp movement of annoyance.

"Possibly," he remarked an instant later. "You are an old soldier, I think?"

"I am one still," the trooper said.

"You are a Frenchman?"

"I have that honour."

The stranger chuckled inwardly. He had caught his man; he had found out his weak point.

"I am alone," he went on. "You have I know not how many comrades. What do you fear?"

"Nothing: but my orders are strict—I dare not break through them."

"We are in the heart of the desert, more than a hundred leagues from every civilised abode. Would you shipwreck me in sight of port, when it only requires a little kindness on your part for me to obtain what I want?"

The trooper hesitated; but after a few minutes' reflection, he said with a toss of his head,—

"No; it is impossible; the captain is stern. All I can do for you is to allow you to bivouac here. To-morrow it will be day; the captain will come out; you will speak to him."

"Hem!" the stranger said thoughtfully, "it is a long time to wait."

"Bah!" the soldier said gaily, "a night is soon passed. Besides, it is your own fault. A man needn't be ashamed of his name."

"But I repeat that your captain never heard mine."

"What matter? A name is always a name."

"Ah!" the stranger suddenly said, "I believe I have found a way to settle everything."

"All the better. I am listening."

"Go and tell the captain that the man who fired a pistol at him a month back at the Rancho of Guaymas is here, and wishes to speak to him."

"Between ourselves, the recommendation seems to me rather scurvy."

"You think so!"

"Parbleu! he was all but assassinated by you. What! it was you?"

"Yes. Well, are you not going?"

"I confess to a certain amount of hesitation."

"You are wrong. The Count de Lhorailles is a brave man. He must have retained our meeting in pleasant memory."

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"After all, that's possible; and besides, you are a stranger. I will go. Wait here, and do not be impatient, for I do not promise you success."

"I am certain of it."

The old soldier dismounted and entered the house. In a few moments he returned.

"Well," the stranger asked, "what answer did the captain give you?"

"He began laughing, and ordered me to bring you in. Come on."

The stranger made no reply; he merely shrugged his shoulders, and followed the worthy trooper."

In an immense hall, whose dilapidated walls threatened to collapse, and to which the star-spangled sky served as a roof, four men of stern features and flashing eyes were seated round a table, served with the most delicate luxury. They were the count and the officers forming his staff, namely Lieutenants Diégo Léon and Martin Leroux, and Don Sylva's old capataz, Blas Vasquez.

The count had been encamped with his free company for the last five days in the Casa Grande of Moctecuzoma. After the attack on the colony by the Apaches, the count, in the hope of finding again his betrothed, who had disappeared in so mysterious a way during the action, and most probably had been carried off by the Indians, immediately formed the resolution of executing the orders government had given him long previously, and which he had hitherto delayed obeying, with pretexts more or less plausible; but in reality because he did not care, brave as he was, to have a fight with the red-skins, who were so resolute and difficult to overcome, especially when attacked on their own territory. The count drew one hundred and twenty Frenchmen from the colony.

The count had asked the hunters, whose help had already been so precious to him, to accompany him. But Count Louis and his two friends preremptorily refused the brilliant offers made to them.

The count was compelled to put up with the capataz and his peons.

The expedition began under favourable auspices: twice were the red-skins surprised by the French and mercilessly massacred. All the Indians who fell alive into the hands of the French were shot, and then hung on trees, head downwards.

Still, after these two encounters, so disastrous for them, the Indians appeared to have taken the hint; and, in spite of all the count's efforts, he found it impossible to catch them again. For about three weeks the count sought their trail, but was unable to discover it. At length, on the eve of the day on which we take up our story again, some seven or eight hundred horsemen entered the ruins about midday, and rushed on the Casa Grande at a frightful pace.

A discharge of musketry from behind the hastily-erected barricades hurled disorder in their ranks, though it did not check the impetus of their attack, and they fell like lightning on the French. The Apaches had plucked up a spirit. Half naked, with their heads laden with plumes, their long buffalo robes fluttering in the wind, steering their horses with their knees, the Indian warriors had a warlike aspect capable of inspiring the most resolute men with terror. The French received them boldly, however, although deafened by the horrible yells their enemies uttered, and blinded by the long barbed arrows which rained around them like hail.

But the Apaches, as much as the French, wished for no mere skirmish. By a common accord they rushed on each other in a hand-to-hand fight. In the midst of the Indian warriors, the Black Bear could be easily recognised by his long plume and the eagle feathers planted in his war-tuft. The chief urged his men on to avenge their preceding defeats by seizing the Casa Grande. Then one of those

fearful frontier actions began, in which no prisoners are made, and which render any description impossible through the ferocity both parties display. This fight, during which the Indians were incessantly reinforced, lasted more than two hours, and the defenders of the barricades allowed themselves to be killed sooner than yield an inch of ground.

Beginning to hope that the Indians must be wearied by so long a struggle and such an obstinate defence, the French redoubled their efforts, when suddenly the cry of "Treason! treason!" was heard in their rear. The count and the capataz turned round. The position was critical. The French were really caught between two fires. The Little Panther at the head of fifty warriors, had turned the position, and taken the barricades in reverse.

The count took a glance at the battle-field, and his determination was at once formed. He said a couple of words to the capataz, who returned to the head of his combatants, warned them what to do, and watched for the favourable moment to carry out his chief's instructions. For his part, the count had lost no time. Seizing a barrel of powder, he put into it a piece of lighted candle, and hurled it into the densest ranks of the Indians, where it burst almost immediately, causing irreparable injury. The terrified Apaches fell into disorder, and fled in every direction to avoid being struck by the fragments of this novel shell.

Profiting cleverly by the respite produced by the barrel among the assailants, the adventurers led by the capataz turned and rushed on the Little Panther's band, which was only a few paces off by this time. The Little Panther and the Apaches rushed forward with yells. The French, as brave and as skilful as their adversaries, boldly awaited with levelled bayonets the skock of the tremendous avalanche, which fell upon them with blinding speed. The red-skins were driven back. The rout commenced.

The count, although satisfied with the victory he had gained, did not consider it decisive, as the Black Bear had escaped. He gave orders to his *cuadrilla* to prepare for a forward march in the desert.

The count fêted with his officers the victory gained on the previous day, and urged them to drink to the success of the expedition they were going to attempt on the morrow. Flushed by the numerous potations he had made, the count was in the best possible temper to hear the singular message the old corporal delivered so much against the grain.

"And what sort of fellow is he?" he asked, when the other had performed his task.

"On my word, captain," the corporal answered, "so far as I could see, he is a stout, well-built young fellow."

The count reflected for a moment.

"Shall I have him shot?" the soldier asked.

"Plague take it, what a hurry you are in, Boiland!" the count said, laughing and looking up. "On the contrary, bring him here with the utmost politeness."

The soldier bowed and retired.

"Gentlemen," the count continued, "you remember the trap to which I almost fell a victim: a certain amount of mystery, which I have never been able to fathom, has since surrounded this affair."

"Senor conde," the capataz observed, "pray take care. This man may come to draw you into a snare."

"For what purpose?"

"*Quien sabe?*" Blas Vasquez answered. "Who knows?"

"Bah! bah!" the count said. "Trust in me, Don Blas, to unmask this scamp, if he be a spy."

The capataz contented himself with an almost imperceptible shrug of his houlders.

The next moment the corporal reappeared, followed by the stranger, on whom all yes were at once fixed. The stranger bore without flinching the cross-fire of lances, and, while remaining completely wrapped up in the folds of his large loak, saluted the company with unparalleled ease.

The silence began to grow embarrassing to all, and the count speedily noticed his.

"Gentlemen," he said, with a peculiar inflection of voice, "allow me to present to ou this caballero, whose name I am not yet acquainted with, but who is one of my most intimate enemies."

"Oh, senor conde!" the unknown said in a stifled voice.

"I am delighted at it," the count said quickly. "Pray do not contradict me, ny dear enemy."

"I never was your enemy; the proof is that I have ridden two hundred eagues to ask a service."

"It is granted ere mentioned; so put off serious matters till to-morrow. Take a glass of champagne."

"Gentlemen, I drink to the fortunate issue of your expedition."

And lifting the glass to his lips, he emptied it at a draught.

"You are a famous companion, sir. I thank you for your toast; it is of good omen to us."

"Commandant, pray be kind enough," Lieutenant Martin said, "to tell us as speedily as possible your amusing relations with this caballero."

"I would do so with pleasure, senores; but I should first like to ask this caballero, who states he has ridden so far to see me, to break an incognito which has lasted too long already."

The stranger began laughing, and, allowing the fold of his cloak to fall, he replied,—

"With the greatest pleasure, caballeros; but I fancy that my name, like my face, will teach you nothing. We only met once, senor conde, and during that interview the night was dark."

"It is true, senor," the count replied, "I do not remember ever having seen you before."

"I was sure of it."

"Then," the count exclaimed hotly, "why did you so obstinately hide your face?"

"Come, sir count, I probably had my reasons for doing so. Who knows if you may not some day have cause to regret making me break my incognito?"

"It is of little consequence, senor," the count said haughtily. "I am one of those men whose sword supports his words; so now have the goodness to give me your name without further excuses or vacillation."

"Which will you have, caballero—my *nom de guerre*, or any other of my aliases?"

"Any one you please," the count said furiously.

"I told you on entering this room, caballero," the stranger said in a firm voice, "that I had ridden two hundred leagues to ask a service of you. I deceived you. I expect nothing of you. What need of your knowing who I am, or what my name is, as I shall not be your obligeé, but you mine?"

"The greater reason, caballero, for you to unmask."

"You will repent of it," senor conde," the stranger replied, with a sardonic smile. "One word more, and a last one. I consent to make myself known but to you privately."

"By Baccus!" Lieutenant Martin exclaimed, "this surpasses all belief."

"I know not if I am mistaken," the capataz exclaimed meaningly; "but I am certain I hold a great place in the mystery."

"You are quite correct, Senor Don Blas," the stranger said with a bow. "You see that I know you. Well, rightly or wrongly, I am convinced that were I to pronounce that name before you, you would induce your friend not to listen to me."

"And what would happen then?" the capataz asked.

"A great misfortune probably," the stranger said in a firm voice. "I only ask of the count ten minutes' conversation; after that he can do whatever he pleases with the secret I entrust to him.

There was a moment's silence. At length the unknown rose, and, bowing to the count, said,—

"Which am I to do, senor—stay or go?"

"Stay!" said the count.

"Good!" the unknown remarked, and seated himself.

"Gentlemen," the count continued, addressing his guests, "you have heard: be kind enough to excuse me for a few moments."

The officers rose and withdrew without a word.

"Now, senor," the count said, addressing his guest so soon as they were alone, "I am awaiting the fulfilment of your promise."

"You are strange, senor, in this country. Having arrived only a few months you do not know the habits of the inhabitants. Relying on the knowledge you attained in your own country, you fancied, on arriving among us, that you could do exactly as you pleased, because your intelligence was so superior to ours, and you have acted accordingly."

"To your story, senor;" the count interrupted.

"I am coming to it, senor. Owing to powerful protectors, you have founded a magnificent colony in the richest province of Mexico, on the desert frontier. You have obtained from government the rank of captain, with the right to raise a free corps, composed exclusively of your own countrymen, specially intended to hunt the Apaches, Comanches, &c."

"Senor, senor! I would remind you that all you are saying is useless," said the count angrily.

"Not so much as you suppose," the other said, still perfectly calm. "I only wished to let you see that if you did not know *me*, I, on the other hand, knew more of you than you imagined."

The count struck the table with his fist and stamped his foot as an outlet for his passion.

"I will go on," the unknown continued. "Certainly, on landing in Mexico, however great your ambition might be, you did not expect to gain such a brilliant position in so short a time. You acted like a clever gambler; and, being afflicted with that vice myself, I can appreciate in others a quality I do not myself possess."

"Oh!" the count said.

"Patience! I am there now. You looked around you, and your eyes were naturally fixed on Don Sylva de Torrès. That caballero combined all the qualities you sought in a father-in-law, for what you wished was to contract a rich marriage. Ah! you no longer interrupt me."

"Continue, senor; you see that I am listening with all necessary patience."

"You shall be rewarded for your complaisance, caballero, be at rest," the unknown said."

"I am anxious to hear the end of your story, senor."

"Unfortunately for your schemes, Dona Anita was not consulted by her father: for a long time she had secretly loved a young man."

"And you know the man's name?"

"Listen. This man returned her love. The two young people met without Don Sylva's knowledge, and swore an eternal love. When Dona Anita was constrained by her father to regard you as her husband, she feigned submission, she warned the man she loved."

"Then," said the count in a gloomy voice, "the attempted assassination at the Rancho——"

"Was a means employed by the lover to get rid of you? Yes, senor," the stranger calmly said.

"This man, then, is only a dastardly assassin!"

"You are wrong, caballero! he only wished to compel you to retire."

"To the point, then!" the count exclaimed. "Assassin or not, you will tell me his name?"

"Not yet. After the meeting at the Rancho you proceeded to your hacienda, accompanied by your future father-in-law and wife. Even then, without leaving you a moment's rest, the hatred of Dona Anita's lover pursued you: the Apaches attacked you."

"Well?"

"Cannot you understand that this man was in league with the red-skins?"

"And you know who carried Dona Anita off?"

"I do."

"But her father was carried off too?"

"I know it; but it was not at all with his will, I assure you."

"Where is Don Sylva now?"

"Quietly at home at Guaymas."

"And you know where his daughter is?"

"I do."

"Now, villain, you will tell me where they are!" said the count, placing a pistol against his breast.

"Is that the game we are playing?" the stranger said. "Well, as you please, caballero."

Then, throwing back his cloak quickly, he aimed at the count two pistols which he held in either hand. Lowering his pistol, and thrusting it back in his girdle, the count muttered,—

"I was mad: pardon that angry movement.

"Most heartily," the unknown replied.

"Pardon me again. Now that I reflect on what you have just told me, I see that your object was to be of service to me. Who are you?"

"I am he who pulled you off your horse."

"Oh!" the count said, with a singular intonation in his voice.

"In a word, my name is Cucharès! I am a lepero; that is to say, I like the sun better than the shade, rest than work, and would sooner stab a man, when properly paid for it, than do a good action."

"Then at this moment you are betraying your friends?"

"A man like myself, caballero, has no friends, only customers."

"Friends or customers, you are betraying them."

"Pooh! we have settled our accounts. They owe me nothing, nor I them. We are quits. I have drawn all I could from the first, so I am going to try the other now."

The count heard the lepero develope this strange theory with an amazement mingled with terror.

"We will agree, then, that you have come to do me a service."

"Come," the lepero exclaimed joyfully, "you are just the man I expected to find you. Well, you can trust in me."

"I must do so, I suppose."

"What would you? It is the way of the world. To-day my turn, to-morrow yours. Bah! you will have no cause to regret a few thousand piastres."

"First, then, my rival's name."

"It will cost you fifty ounces, and you cannot think it dear."

"Here they are," the count said,

The lepero made them disappear in a second in his large pockets.

"The name of your rival, caballero, is Don Martial. He is a Tigrero, and very rich."

"I fancy I have heard Don Sylva mention that name."

"Don Sylva cannot endure Don Martial."

"And now, how did Don Martial carry the girl off?"

"Very easily, the more so as she wished nothing better than to follow him. During the fight with the Apaches he placed Dona Anita in a canoe, into which I had already thrown her father, gagged and tied; then we went off, all four of us. But the next day Don Martial ordered me to take the young girl's father to Guaymas, and I fulfilled this difficult commission with all honour. Don Sylva was unwilling to follow me; but at last I managed to get him into his own house, where I left him, and went back to Don Martial."

"Ah!" the count said, "and how did you come to leave him?"

"Good gracious! caballero, we separated in consequence of a misunderstanding."

"Very good! He turned you off?"

"Nearly so, I am obliged to confess."

"Can you lead me to the spot where he now is?"

"Yes, whenever you please. But to save trouble they are at the mission of Don Francisco. But now I must ask permission to leave you."

"I doubt your truth in the first place. In spite of all the confidence I have in you, nothing has yet proved to me that you have told the truth."

"Oh!" the lepero said with a gesture of denial.

"I know very well I am mistaken; but what would you have? I am naturally suspicious."

"Good! I will remain."

"I will give you one hundred ounces to lead me to my rival."

"*Canarios!*" the lepero exclaimed.

"One hundred ounces," the count said again.

"I understand you. One hundred ounces—a fine sum. But look ye, count: I am a costeno, and a lepero in the bargain. This desert life does not suit my temperament No, taking all things into consideration, I assure you it is impossible."

"That is unlucky," the count coldly replied.

"It is."

"Because," he continued, "I would have given you not one, but two hundred ounces."

"Eh?" the other said, cocking his ears.

"But as you refuse I shall be obliged to have you shot."

"What do you say?" the lepero exclaimed, with a movement of terror.

"By'r Lady!" the count said simply, "my dear fellow, you are so clever in business matters that, having found two sides of a question, I am terribly frightened lest you should find a third."

And before Cucharès could prevent him he seized the pistols that lay on the table. The lepero turned livid.

"Pardon me, pardon me!" he said in an ill-assured voice. "As you desire it so eagerly, I accept the two hundred ounces."

"Very good!" the count exclaimed. "I thought we should come to an understanding."

He went to fetch the money from an iron chest; but as he turned his back on the lepero, he could not see the singular smile that curved his lips.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH THE STORY GOES BACK.

THE lepero's story, true in its foundation, was utterly false and erroneous in its details.

After escaping so miraculously from the hands of the Apaches, into whose power he had fallen, Cucharès dived and sought the centre of the river. On mounting to the surface again he looked around him: he was alone. The lepero stifled a cry of joy, and, after a moment's reflection, swam vigorously in the direction of the mangroves. With a few strokes he reached the trees, beneath whose shade he disappeared. But another piece of good luck awaited him there: the canoe, abandoned to itself, had floated up against the trunk of a tree and remained stationary.

Cucharès, leaving the water, soon succeeded in emptying the canoe and making it float again. These boats are so light that they can be easily emptied.

"You have been a long time," said a voice.

The lepero gave a start of terror; but he recognized Don Martial. In very few words he explained all.

"It is all the better, as you have come here," the Tigrero said. "Hide yourself in the mangroves."

And he rapidly retired. Cucharès obeyed with more zeal because he heard at no great distance from him, the sound of the obstinate contest going on. Don Martial, dagger in hand, in readiness for any event, had glided like a phantom up to a clump of floripondins, where Dona Anita awaited him all trembling. Just as he was going to pull back the branches that separated him from the young girl, he stopped with panting breast and frowning brow. She was not alone. Dona Anita was talking: it was her father.

All was lost!

The haciendero was trying to lead his daughter in the direction of the buildings, while employing the most convincing reasons. He did not appear to suspect the motive which had brought his daughter to that spot.

Don Martial struck his brow; a singular smile played on his lips; his eyes flashed fire, and he noiselessly slipped back to the river bank. Still the combat was going on; at times it appeared to draw nearer—oaths and yells could be distinguished; at others, flashes lit up the scene, and a shower of bullets whizzed through the air with that sharp, hissing sound, which terrifies novices in warfare.

"In the name of Heaven, my beloved daughter," Don Sylva urged, "come! We have not a moment to lose. Come, I implore you!"

"No, my father!" she said; "whatever may happen, I repeat to you, I will not leave this spot."

"It is madness," the haciendero exclaimed in great grief. "You wish to die, then?"

"What matter to me?" she said sorrowfully. "Heaven is my witness, father, that I would gladly die to escape the marriage prepared for me."

"My daughter, in the Virgin's name——"

"To-morrow you would surrender me with your own hands to a man I detest."

"Speak not to me thus, daughter. Come, the shouts are growing more furious; it will soon be too late."

"Go, if you think proper," she said resolutely. "I shall remain here, whatever may happen."

Don Sylva stopped in hesitation: he knew his daughter's firm and determined character. A few minutes elapsed, during which father and daughter stood face to face, not uttering a word, or making even a gesture.

Suddenly the branches were noiselessly parted, yielding a passage to two men, who, rushing with panther bounds on the haciendero, hurled him to the ground. Before Don Sylva was able to recognize the enemies who attacked him so unexpectedly by the pale beams of the stars, he was gagged and bound. The daughter, at this sudden attack, uttered a cry of terror, at once prudently checked, for she had recognized Don Martial.

"Silence!" the Tigrero hurriedly said in a low voice. "I could manage in no other way. Come, come, your father, you know, is a sacred object to me."

The girl made no reply. Cucharès seized Don Sylva, and threw him on his shoulder.

"Where are we going?" Dona Anita asked.

"To a place where we can be happy together," the Tigrero answered gently, as he lifted her with a passionate movement, and ran off with her to the canoe. Dona Anita made no resistance; she smiled, and threw her arms round her lover's neck to keep her balance during this steeple-chase, in which Don Martial leaped from branch to branch, holding on by the creepers, and encouraging his lovely burden by signs and looks. Cucharès had placed Don Sylva in the bottom of the canoe, and, paddles in hand, was impatiently waiting the Tigrero's arrival.

"What shall we do?" Cucharès asked.

"Get into the middle of the river, and slip down with the current."

"But our horses!"

"Let us save ourselves first; we will think of the horses afterwards. It is evident that the white men are the victors. So soon as the fight is over, Count de Lhorailles will send everywhere in search of his guests."

"Still I fancy——" Cucharès timidly observed.

"Be off!" the Tigrero said in a peremptory tone.

The first moments of the voyage passed in silence.

Don Martial had assumed a tremendous responsibility by staking, as it were, on one throw the happiness of the girl he loved and his own. Besides, the haciendero lying at the bottom of the canoe, gave him great subject for thought.

Dona Anita was dreamily letting her dainty hand glide through the water over the side of the canoe.

As for Don Sylva de Torrès, he was not reflecting. A prey to one of those dumb passions which, if they lasted any length of time, must end in insanity, he frantically bit the gag that shut his mouth, and writhed in his bonds, while unable to break them.

The various sounds of the contest gradually died out. For some time longer the travellers remained silent, absorbed, not only in their thoughts, but affected by that gentle melancholy produced on all nervous natures by that solemn calmness and striking harmony of the desert, whose sublime and majestic grandeur no human pen is capable of describing.

"Where are we going?" Anita at last asked him in a gentle and resigned voice.

"We are flying," he laconically answered.

"We have been descending the river in this way for more than six hours. Are we not out of reach of danger?"

"Yes, long ago. It is not any fear of the French which troubles me now——"

"What, then?"

The Tigrero pointed to Don Sylva, who was sleeping, quite exhausted.

"Alas!" she said, "you are right. Things cannot go on thus, my friend; the position is intolerable."

"If you will allow me to act as I think proper, before a quarter of an hour your father will thank me."

"Do you not know that I am entirely yours?"

"Thanks!" he said. Turning to Cucharès, he muttered a few words in his ear.

"Ah, ah! that is an idea," the lepero said with a grin. Two minutes later the canoe ran ashore. Don Sylva was carried ashore without waking.

"Now it is your turn," Don Martial said to the girl: "for the success of the scheme I have formed, you must allow yourself to be fastened to this tree."

"Do so, my friend."

The Tigrero took her in his vigorous arms, bore her ashore, and in a twinkling had fastened her tightly by the waist to the stem of a tree.

"Now," he said hurriedly, "remember this: Your father and yourself were carried off from the hacienda by the Apaches; accident brought us up."

"You save us, I suppose?" she said with a smile.

"Quite correct; but utter shrill cries."

The play was performed in the way arranged. The girl uttered piercing shrieks, to which the two adventurers replied by discharging their rifles and pistols; then they rushed toward the haciendero, whom they hastened to liberate from his bonds, and to whom they restored not only the use of his limbs, but also of his eyes and tongue. Don Sylva half rose, and looked around him: he saw his daughter fastened to a tree, from which two men were hastily freeing her.

So soon as Dona Anita was free she ran to her father, and cast herself in his arms.

"My poor darling child," murmured the old man, with tears in his eyes, "it was for you, for you alone, I trembled during the whole of this fearful night."

The girl made no reply, for she felt stung to the heart by this reproach. Don Martial and Cucharès here approached, holding their smoking rifles in their hands. On recognizing them a cloud passed over the haciendero's face. Don Martial was embarrassed by this silence, which he had been far from anticipating.

"I am happy," said he, in an embarrassed voice, "to have arrived here so fortunately, Don Sylva."

"I thank you, Senor Don Martial," the haciendero answered dryly. "I could

expect nothing less from your gallantry. You are destined, I see it, to be the liberator of my entire family: receive my sincere thanks."

These words were uttered with an accent of raillery that pierced the Tigrero like an arrow.

"My father," Dona Anita said, in a caressing tone, "Don Martial has risked his life for us."

"Have I not thanked him for it?" he continued. "The affair was a sharp one, as it seems, but was no one killed?"

And saying this, the haciendero affected to look carefully around him. Don Martial drew himself up.

"Senor Don Sylva," he said, "as chance has brought us once again face to face, permit me to tell you that few men are so devoted to you as myself."

"You have just proved it, caballero."

"Leave that out of sight," he went on hurriedly. "Now that you are free, and can act as you please, command me. What would you of me?"

"That is language I can understand, caballero, and to which I will frankly respond. Important reasons compel me to return to the French colony of Guetzalli."

"When do you wish to start?"

"At once, if that be possible."

"Everything is possible, caballero. Still we cannot make the journey on foot."

"Especially my daughter, I presume," the other remarked with a sardonic smile.

"Yes," the Tigrero said, "especially the senorita."

"What else is to be done? for I must return there—with my daughter," he added.

The Tigrero did not utter the exact truth in telling Don Sylva they were thirty leagues from the colony. It was not more than eighteen; but in a country like this, where roads do not exist, fifteen leagues are an almost insurmountable obstacle.

Don Sylva, like a good many of his countrymen, was gifted with rare obstinacy. When he had formed a plan, the greater the obstacles which prevented its accomplishment, the greater his determination.

"Listen," he said to Don Martial; "I wish to be frank. I fancy I tell you nothing new in announcing my daughter's marriage with the Count de Lhorailles. That marriage must be performed. And now I am about to make trial of the devotion you boast of."

"Speak, senor."

"You will send your companion to the Count de Lhorailles."

"Good."

"Thanks! Now, as regards yourself personally, I leave you at liberty to follow or leave us at your pleasure; but, in the first place, we want horses, arms, and, above all, an escort."

"Remain here: in two hours I will return with horses. As for an escort, I will try and procure you one, although I do not promise it. As you allow me to do so, I will accompany you till you have rejoined the *conde*."

"Whatever may happen," said the haciendero, "I thank you; you will not the less have done me an immense service."

Don Sylva tore a leaf from his pocket-book, on which he wrote a few lines, and handed it to the Tigrero.

"Are you sure of that man?" he asked him.

"As of myself," Don Martial answered evasively.

The haciendero made a sign of satisfaction as the Tigrero went up to Cucharès.

"Listen," he said. "Within two days you must have delivered this to the chief of Guetzalli."

"Yes," the lepero replied.

"Go, and may Heaven protect you. In a quarter of an hour behind that mound," hurriedly added in a whisper.

"Agreed," the other said, with a bow.

"Take the canoe," the Tigrero continued.

Had the haciendero conceived any doubts, they were dissipated when he saw charès leap into the canoe.

"The first part of your instructions is fulfilled," the Tigrero said, returning to Don lva's side. Now for the second part. Take my pistols and musket. Pray do t move, and within two hours at the latest I will rejoin you."

"Do you know, then, where to find horses?"

"Do you not remember that the desert is my domain?" he replied with a melan- oly smile. "Farewell for the present."

And he went off in a direction opposed to that taken by the canoe. When he had sappeared from Don Sylva's sight behind a clump of trees and shrubs, the Tigrero ned sharply to the right and ran back. Cucharès was smoking a cigarette while aiting him.

"No words, but deeds," the Tigrero said.

"I am listening."

"Look at this diamond." And he pointed to a ring.

"It is worth 6,000 piastres," Cucharès said.

"I give it to you," said Don Martial.

"What am I to do for it?"

"First, hand me the letter."

"Here it is."

Don Martial took it, and tore it into impalpable fragments.

"Next?" Cucharès continued.

"Next, I have another diamond like that one at your service. On one condition."

"I know it," the other said, with a significant sign. "He shall never trouble you gain."

"Good! But you understand that I shall need proofs."

"You shall have them."

"Good-bye, then."

The two accomplices separated, well satisfied with each other. A nod was as ood as a wink in such a case. We have seen how Cucharès acquitted himself of e mission intrusted to him by Don Sylva. Don Martial, after his short conversa- on with Cucharès, went to look for horses. Two hours later he had returned. He ot only brought excellent horses, but had hired four peons, or men who called them- lves so, to act as escort. The haciendero comprehended all the delicacy of Don artial's conduct; and though the air and garb of his defenders were not completely thodox, he warmly thanked the Tigrero for the trouble he had taken to supply his ants. Reassured as to his journey, he breakfasted with good appetite on a lump venison, washed down with *pulque*, which Don Martial had procured.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE PRAIRIE.

Don Sylva de Torrès wished to reach the colony of Guetzalli again so soon as possible, and by the most direct route. Unfortunately he was obliged to cross, as the crow flies, a large extent of country through which no road ran. Moreover, owing to his topographical ignorance of the prairie, he was compelled to trust in Don Martial, an excellent guide in every respect, whose sagacity and thorough knowledge of the desert he did not for a moment doubt.

Still the Tigrero (apparently at least) gave proofs of his entire devotion to the haciendero, leading him by the most beaten tracks, making him avoid difficult passages, and watching with unequalled care and solicitude over the safety of his little band. On the evening of the fourth day, after a fatiguing march over an irregular tract, Don Martial reached a hill where he proposed to camp.

The haciendero greeted the offer with the greater pleasure, for, being but little accustomed to this mode of travelling, he felt extremely fatigued. After a frugal meal, Don Sylva, wrapped himself in his zarapè, laid down with his feet toward the fire, and fell into a profound sleep.

Don Martial and the young girl remained for some time silent opposite each other. At length, when the Tigrero was persuaded that Don Sylva was really asleep, he bent over her, and muttered in her ear in a gentle voice,—

"Pardon, Dona Anita, pardon!"

"For what?" she asked in surprise.

"Because you are suffering through me."

"Egotist!" she said with an enchanting smile, "is it not through myself too, as I love you?"

"Oh, thank you!" he exclaimed. "You restore to my heart that courage which I felt dying out."

"Well, I am convinced," she said quickly. "My father, believe me, will soon change his opinion about you."

"Still," said the Tigrero, "I cannot carry you about the prairie indefinitely."

"That is true," she remarked despondently.

"For the last two days we have only been moving round the colony, from which we are scarce three leagues distant."

"Alas!" the girl murmured.

"Ah!" he continued, with a degree of animation in his glance, "why is this man your father, Dona Anita?"

"Speak not so, my friend," she said. "Why despair? God is good; He will not fail us."

"Still," he replied, shaking his head, "our position is not tenable. It is impossible to go on at hap-hazard. Your father will at length perceive I am deceiving him. Oh! I would joyfully give ten years of my life to know how I ought to act."

At this moment, as if heaven had heard his words, the Tigrero saw a short distance off, in the midst of the tall grass, a luminous point arise in the air twice, tracing in its passage quaint parabolas.

"It is extraordinary," he muttered to himself. "What can it mean? Is it a signal?"

Vhat is the matter, my friend?" Dona Anita asked anxiously. "You restless. Can any danger menace us? Speak!"

Vell, yes," he replied, resolutely making up his mind, "something extra-ary is really happening."

But what is it? I saw nothing."

Stay: look there!" he said quickly.

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Tis evidently a signal," the Tigrero went on. "Somebody is concealed e."

Do you expect any one?" she asked him.

No; and yet, I know not why, but I fancy that signal can only be intended ne."

Still recollect that we are in the prairie, and probably, without suspecting rrounded by bands of Indian hunters.

No, Dona Anita, you are mistaken. We are not surrounded by any Indians, re alone, quite alone."

How can you know that, my friend, since you have not left us for a moment o and look for trails?"

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Oh, Don Martial, I implore you take care! Be prudent. Think of me!" added in agony.

Reassure yourself, Dona Anita. I am too old a wood-ranger to let myself leceived by a clumsy trick. I shall return shortly."

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You are quite right, and in such a country as this it is better to be too prudent."

Ah, ah! there is something new?" the Tigrero said.

Caspita! if there was not, should I be here?"

True: you are a comrade, and I thank you for coming. You know that I have ithful memory. Now for the news."

Here it is, short and good. *El senor conde*, rendered desperate by the disappear-e of his betrothed, whom he supposes to have been carried off by the Apaches, quitted the hacienda at the head of his company, and is now crossing the desert very direction in pursuit of the Black Bear."

By all the Saints! that is the best news you could bring me. And what do you n doing?"

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"*Caspita!* if there was not, should I be here?"

"True: you are a comrade, and I thank you for coming. You know that I have a faithful memory. Now for the news."

"Here it is, short and good. *El senor conde*, rendered desperate by the disappearance of his betrothed, whom he supposes to have been carried off by the Apaches, has quitted the hacienda at the head of his company, and is now crossing the desert in every direction in pursuit of the Black Bear."

"By all the Saints! that is the best news you could bring me. And what do you intend doing?"

"What! did we not agree that *el conde*——"

"Of course," the Tigrero quickly interrupted him; "but to do that you must find him, and that, I fancy, is not so easy now."

"Why, Senor Don Martial, do you wish to insult me by taking me for a *pavo* (goose)?"

"By no means, gossip: still——"

"Still you believe it. Well, you are mistaken, caballero, and I am not sorry to tell you so. During the few hours I spent at the hacienda I made inquiries, and, as I announced myself the bearer of a most important mission for *el senor conde*, no one made any bones about answering me. The *conde* is pursuing the Apaches, is he not?"

"You told me so."

"Well, in all probability he will not dare to enter the desert."

"Naturally," the Tigrero said with a shudder, in spite of his tried courage.

"Well, then, he can only stop at one spot."

"At the Casa Grande!" Don Martial exclaimed quickly.

"Quite right! I shall set out immediately after your departure."

The Tigrero looked at him in surprise.

"You're a fine fellow, Cucharès, on my soul!" he said presently.

"What would you?" the scamp answered modestly, "the relations into which I entered with you are so agreeable that I can refuse you nothing."

The two men began laughing at this sally, which might have been in better taste.

The men separated—Cucharès to commence a long journey, and Don Martial to return to his camping ground. But they were mistaken in supposing that no one had overheard their conversation. They had scarce quitted the island in different directions ere, from a thicket of dahlias and floripondins growing at the entrance of the grotto, a hideous head was thrust out cautiously, and looked around; then, at the end of a moment, the bushes were further parted, and an Apache Indian, painted and armed for war, appeared. It was the Black Bear.

"Wah!" he muttered with a menacing gesture, "the pale-faces are dogs."

Then, after keeping his eyes fixed for a few instants on the star-spangled sky, he entered the grotto.

In the meanwhile the Tigrero had regained the encampment. Dona Anita was awaiting him with the most lively anxiety.

"Well?" she asked, running up so soon as she saw him.

"Good news," he answered.

"Oh, I was so frightened!"

"I thank you. It was as I expected. The signal was intended for me."

"Then?"

"I found a friend, who gave me the means to quit the false position in which we are."

"In what way?"

"Do not trouble yourself about anything, I repeat."

The girl bowed submissively, and in spite of the curiosity that devoured her, retired without any further questioning into the jacal of branches prepared for her. Don Martial, instead of sleeping, sat down on the ground, folded his arms on his chest, leaned against a tree, and remained thus motionless till daybreak, plunged in deep and melancholy thought. At sunrise the Tigrero shook off the effects of his night-watch, and aroused his comrades.

"Oh, oh!" the haciendero said, "you are very early this morning."

"Did you not notice that we did not even breakfast before starting, as we usually do?"

"Of course I did."

you know the reason? Because we shall breakfast at Guetzalli."
, *caramba!*" the haciendero exclaimed, "you delight me with that news."
ought I should."
Anita on hearing him speak thus, had looked sorrowfully at Don Martial;
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CHAPTER XIX.

"BOOT AND SADDLE!"

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drinking and laughing again in their society. They rose from table at
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ily engaged in thinking.
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on which they had been sleeping, shook off the night's cold, and were
engaged in dressing their horses and preparations for the morning's
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Dona Anita on hearing him speak thus, had looked sorrowfully at Don Martial; but seeing his face so calm, his smile so frank, she felt suddenly reassured.

As Don Martial had stated, two hours later they reached the colony. So soon as they were perceived by the sentinels the isthmus drawbridge was lowered, and they entered the hacienda, where they were received with all possible politeness. Dona Anita, with her eyes constantly fixed on the Tigrero, blushed and turned pale, understanding nothing of his perfect calmness. They dismounted in the second courtyard before the gate of honour.

"Where is the Count de Lhorailles?" the haciendero asked.

"My master will feel annoyed, when he hears of your arrival, at not having been present to welcome you," the steward answered, breaking out into profuse apologies.

"Is he absent, then?"

"Yes, senor."

"But he will soon return?"

"I hardly think so. The captain started in pursuit of the savages at the head of his entire company."

This news was a thunderbolt for Don Sylva; but the Tigrero and Dona Anita exchanged a glance of delight.

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In the great hall of the Casa Grande the count and his lieutenants, seated on the dried skulls of buffaloes, were holding a council. The discussion was animated.

"In an hour," the count said, "we shall set out. We have twenty mules laden with provisions, ten to carry water, and eight for ammunition. We have, therefore, nothing to fear."

"That is true to a certain point, senor conde," the capataz observed; "but we have no guides."

"What use are guides?" the count said, passionately. "I fancy we need only follow the Apache trail."

Blas Vasquez shook his head.

"You do not know the Del Norte, excellency," he said, candidly.

"This is the first time accident has brought me this way."

"I pray God it be not the last."

"What do you mean?" the count said.

"Senor conde, the Del Norte is not a desert, but a gulf of shifting sands; at the slightest breath of air in these desolate regions the sand rises, whirls, and swallows up men and horses, leaving not a trace."

"Oh, oh!" the count said, thoughtfully.

"Believe me," the capataz continued; "do not venture with your soldiers into this implacable desert."

"Still the Apaches are men, too; they are not braver or better mounted than we, I may say."

"They are not."

"Well, they cross the Del Norte continually, whenever the fancy takes them."

"But do you know at what price, senor conde? Have you counted the corpses they leave along the road to mark their passage?"

"Then," the count exclaimed, impatiently, "your impression is——"

"That in bringing you here, and attacking you two days ago, the Apaches laid a trap for you. They wish to entice you after them into the desert."

"Still you will agree with me, my dear Don Blas, that it is very extraordinary there is not among all your peons one capable of guiding us in this desert."

"Yes, excellency, but I have more than once had the honour of observing to you that all these men are costenos, or inhabitants of the seaboard."

"What shall we do, then?" the count asked, with some hesitation.

Return to the colony," the capataz replied.

"Shall we abandon Don Sylva and his daughter?"

"Excellency, I was born on the estate of the Torrès family. No one is more devoted, body and soul, than I am to the persons whose names you have pronounced; but no one is bound to attempt impossibilities. It would be tempting God to enter the desert in our present state.

There was a moment's silence. These words produced on the count's mind an impression which he tried in vain to master. The lepero guessed his hesitation, and approached.

"Why," he said, in a crafty voice, "did you not tell me that you needed a guide, senor conde?"

"What good would that do?"

"In fact, that is true; it was not worth the trouble, as I promised to conduct you to Don Sylva."

"You know the road, then "

"As well as a man can who has gone along it twice."

"By heavens!" the count exclaimed, "we can push on now; nothing need keep us longer. Diégo Léon, order 'the boot and saddle' to be sounded, and if you are a good guide, you shall have proofs of my satisfaction."

"Oh, you can trust to me, excellency!" the lepero answered, with a dubious smile.

"I ask no more."

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"Enough, Don Gaëtan," he said, coldly. "In warning you I acted as my conscience commanded. You will not attend to my advice—you need not do so: I have done my duty as I was bound to do."

"Thanks!" the count answered, affectionately pressing his hand; "I felt sure that you would not abandon me."

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"Captain," the lieutenant answered, in a panting voice, "the company has revolted."

"Eh? What! my troopers have revolted?"

"Yes, captain."

"Ah!" he said, biting his moustaches, "and why have they revolted, if you please?"

"Because they do not wish to enter the desert."

"They do not wish!" the count continued; "are you sure of what you say?"

"I swear it, captain; but listen."

In fact, shouts and oaths, an ever-increasing noise, which was beginning to assume formidable proportions, were heard outside.

"Oh, oh! that is becoming serious, I fancy," the count continued.

"Much more than you suppose, captain. The company, I repeat, is in complete mutiny.

"I am curious to see that," the count said.

"Stay, captain," the officers exclaimed, as they rushed before him; "our men are exasperated."

"Gentlemen," he replied, angrily repulsing them; "you are mad: they do not know me well enough yet."

And, without listening to any entreaty, he slowly walked out of the room with a firm and calm step.

What had happened may be told in a few words.

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In the morning the rumour had spread that the camp was about to be raised in order to enter the desert in pursuit of the Apaches. At once groups were formed—commentaries commenced—the men gradually grew excited. Resistance was soon organised, and when the lieutenant came to give orders to raise the camp he was greeted with laughter, jests, and hisses.

An officer, under such circumstances, acts very wrongly in losing his coolness, and yielding a step in the presence of revolt. He ought rather to let himself be killed. In a mutiny one concession compels another.

This happened under the present circumstances. So soon as the lieutenant had retired, his departure was at once regarded in the light of a triumph. The soldiers began haranguing, influenced by those among them whose tongues were most loosely hung. It was no longer a question about not entering the desert, but of appointing other officers, and returning at once to the colony. The entire staff must be changed, and the leaders chosen from those who inspired their comrades with most confidence—that is to say, the most dangerous fellows.

Suddenly the door opened, and the count appeared. He was pale, but calm. He took a quiet look at the mutinous band that howled around him.

"The captain! Here is the captain!" the troopers shouted.

"Kill him!" others went on.

"Down with him! down with him!" they howled in chorus.

All rushed upon him, brandishing weapons and offering insults. But the count did not give way; on the contrary, he advanced a step. He held in his mouth a fine husk cigarette.

Nothing imposes on masses like cold and unaffected courage. There was a pause in the revolt. The count profited by the moment of silence he had obtained to take the word.

"What do you want?" he asked, calmly, while withdrawing his cigarette from his mouth.

At this question of their captain's the charm was broken; the shouts and yells recommenced with even greater intensity; the rebels were angry with themselves for having allowed their chief's firmness to overawe them. They surrounded the count, pulling him in every direction to force him to listen to them. The count, pressed and hustled by these rogues, who had thrown discipline overboard, and were sure of impunity in a country where justice only nominally exists, did not lose his coolness. He allowed these men to yell for some moments, their eyes bloodshot, and foam on their lips; and when he considered this had lasted long enough, he said:

"My friends, it is impossible for us to go on talking in this way; I understand nothing of what you say. Choose one of your comrades to make your complaints in your name.

After uttering these words the count leaned his shoulder against the door, crossed his arms on his chest, and began smoking again. The calmness and firmness displayed by the count from the beginning of this scene had already borne their fruit. Some, though they dared not yet openly avow the sympathy they felt with their chief, warmly supported the proposition he had made.

"The captain is right," they said. "It is impossible, if we continue to badger him in this way, that he can understand our arguments."

"We must be just, too," others took up the ball.

The revolt had made an immense backward step. It no longer spoke of deposing its chiefs; it limited itself to asking justice of the captain.

At length, after numberless discussions among the mutineers, one of their number was selected to take the word in the name of the rest. This man, whose *nom de guerre* was Curtius, was a Parisian, and hailed from the Faubourg Saint Marceau. An ex-soldier, an ex-sailor, he had been at every trade, except, perhaps, that of an

an. He inspired his comrades with an instinctive terror. When he was
take the word, he rammed his hat down on the side of his head, and,
his comrades, said:
shall see how I'll walk into him."
advanced, insolently swaying from side to side, toward the captain, who
his approach with a smile of peculiar meaning.
Curtius was only two paces from his captain he stopped, and, surveying
ently, said;
, captain, the business is this; my com——"
count gave him no time to finish. Quickly drawing a pistol from his
pressed it against his temples and blew out his brains. The bandit rolled
st with a fractured skull. The captain returned the pistol to his sash, and
d:
any one further observations to make?"
stirred; the bandits had suddenly become lambs. They stood silent and
before their chief, for they understood him.
up this carrion," said the count, spurning the corpse with his foot. "We
h'yeers, and woe to the man who does not carry out the clauses of our
t. I will kill him like a dog. In ten minutes the 'boot and saddle' will
ll the worse for the man who is not ready."
his thundering speech the count re-entered the house with as firm a step as
ft it. The revolt was subdued—the wild beasts had recognised the iron
th the velvet glove.
no matter," the soldiers said to each other, "he is a rude fellow for all that;
any cold in his eyes."
en each eagerly made his preparations for departure. Ten minutes later,
tain had announced, he reappeared: the troop was on horseback, ranged
f battle, and ready to start.
!" Cucharès muttered to himself, "what a pity that Don Martial has such
onds!"
long the free company, with the captain at its head, disappeared in the
.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CONFESSION

lendero and his daughter left the colony of Guetzalli under the escort of Don
and the four peons he had taken into his service. The little band advanced
st, in the direction in which the free company had marched in pursuit of
hes. Don Sylva was the more anxions to rejoin the French because he knew

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The revolt had made an immense backward step. It no longer spoke of deposin its chiefs; it limited itself to asking justice of the captain.

At length, after numberless discussions among the mutineers, one of their numb was selected to take the word in the name of the rest. This man, whose *nom guerre* was Curtius, was a Parisian, and hailed from the Faubourg Saint Marcea An ex-soldier, an ex-sailor, he had been at every trade, except, perhaps, that of

honest man. He inspired his comrades with an instinctive terror. When he was selected to take the word, he rammed his hat down on the side of his head, and, addressing his comrades, said:

"You shall see how I'll walk into him."

And he advanced, insolently swaying from side to side, toward the captain, who watched his approach with a smile of peculiar meaning.

When Curtius was only two paces from his captain he stopped, and, surveying him insolently, said;

"Come, captain, the business is this; my com——"

But the count gave him no time to finish. Quickly drawing a pistol from his girdle, he pressed it against his temples and blew out his brains. The bandit rolled in the dust with a fractured skull. The captain returned the pistol to his sash, and coolly said:

"Has any one further observations to make?"

No one stirred; the bandits had suddenly become lambs. They stood silent and penitent before their chief, for they understood him.

"Pick up this carrion," said the count, spurning the corpse with his foot. "We are Dauph'yeers, and woe to the man who does not carry out the clauses of our agreement. I will kill him like a dog. In ten minutes the 'boot and saddle' will sound; all the worse for the man who is not ready."

After this thundering speech the count re-entered the house with as firm a step as he had left it. The revolt was subdued—the wild beasts had recognised the iron grip beneath the velvet glove.

"'Tis no matter," the soldiers said to each other, "he is a rude fellow for all that; he hasn't any cold in his eyes."

And then each eagerly made his preparations for departure. Ten minutes later, as the captain had announced, he reappeared: the troop was on horseback, ranged in order of battle, and ready to start.

"Hum!" Cucharès muttered to himself, "what a pity that Don Martial has such fine diamonds!"

Before long the free company, with the captain at its head, disappeared in the Del Norte.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CONFESSION

The haciendero and his daughter left the colony of Guetzalli under the escort of Don Martial and the four peons he had taken into his service. The little band advanced to the west, in the direction in which the free company had marched in pursuit of the Apaches. Don Sylva was the more anxious to rejoin the French because he knew

that their expedition had no other purpose than to deliver him and his daughter fr the hands of the red-skins.

The journey was gloomy and silent. As the travellers approached the desert scenery assumed a sombre grandeur peculiar to primitive countries, which exercis an unconscious influence over the mind, and plunged them into a melancholy whi they were powerless to overcome.

Each evening, after the Tigrero had beaten the vicinity to drive back the wil beasts, the camp was formed by the bank of a stream, the fires lighted, and a hu of branches hastily constructed to protect Dona Anita from the night cold then, after a scanty meal, they wrapped themselves up in their fressadas an zarapès, and slept till daybreak. The only incidents which at times disturbe the monotony of their life were the discovery of an elk or deer, in pursuit o which Don Martial and his peons galloped at full speed, and it often took hour ere the poor brute was headed and killed. But there were none of thos pleasant chats and confidences which make time appear less tedious, and rende the fatigues of an interminable road endurable. The travellers maintained a reserve toward each other, which not only kept all intimacy aloof, but also an confidence.

Man, with his necessarily incomplete nature, is neither entirely good nor entirely bad. Most frequently, after committing actions under the iron pressure of passion or personal interest, when his coolness has returned, and he measures the depth of the abyss in which he has precipitated himself, he regrets them, especially if his life, though not exemplary, has at least hitherto been exempt from deeds which are offensive to morality. Such was at thi moment the situation of Don Martial and Dona Anita. Both had been led b their mutual love to commit a fault they bitterly repented; for we will stat here, to prevent our readers forming an erroneous estimate of their character that their hearts were honest, and when, in a moment of madness, they arrange and carried out their flight, they were far from foreseeing the fatal consequence which this hopeless step would entail.

Don Martial, especially after the orders he had given Cucharès, and the haciendero's unshaken determination of rejoining the Count de Lhorailles clearly comprehended that his position was growing with each moment more difficult, and that he was proceeding along a path that had no outlet. Thus the two lovers, fatally attached by the secret of their flight, still kept hidden from each other the remorse that devoured them; they felt at each step that the ground on which they walked was undermined, and that it might suddenly give way beneath their feet.

In such a situation life became intolerable, as there was no longer a community of thought or feeling between these three persons.

They at length reached the Casa Grande, and nothing extraordinary had met their sight. Night had almost set in, and objects began to grow confused in the shadows. Don Martial, who was preparing to dismount, suddenly stopped, uttering a cry of astonishment, almost of terror.

"What is it?" Don Sylva asked quickly, as he walked up to the Tigrero.

"Look?" the latter said, stretching out his arm in the direction of a clump of stunted trees which stood a short distance from the entrance. The human voice exerts a strange faculty over animals—that of inspiring them with insurmountable fear and respect. To the few words exchanged by the two men, hoarse and confused cries responded, and seven or eight savage vultures rose from the centre of the clump.

"I can see nothing," Don Sylva went on; "it is as black as in an oven."

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"That is true: still, if you look more carefully at the object I point out, you will easily recognise it."

"A man hung by the feet!" he uttered, stopping his horse with a gesture of horror and disgust. "What can have happened here?"

"Who can say? It is not a savage. What is the meaning of it?"

"A mutiny perhaps," the haciendero hazarded.

Don Martial became pensive; his eyebrows contracted. "It is not possible," he said to himself; but a moment after added, "Let us enter the house; we must not leave Dona Anita any longer alone. Our absence must surprise her, and might alarm her if prolonged. When the encampment is arranged, I will go and look."

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It was he, too, who had urged his companions to proceed to the Casa Grande, for he was convinced that the count could only find there a safe and sure bivouac for his troop. The hall, in which a table still stood, presented unmistakable signs of the recent passage of several persons.

"You see," he said to the haciendero, "that I was not mistaken; the persons we seek stopped here."

"It is true. Do you think that they have long left it?"

"I cannot tell you yet; but while supper is being prepared, and you are making yourselves comfortable, I will take a look round outside."

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"Well?" Don Sylva asked him.

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The meal was short, as might be expected from persons pre-occupied and wearied with a long day's march. Indeed, with the exception of the roast venison, it only consisted of *cainc*, maize tortillas, and *frijoles con aji*. Dona Anita ate a few spoonsful of tamarind preserve; then, after bowing to her friends, she rose and walked into a small room adjoining the hall.

"You fellows," the Tigrero said, addressing the peons, "had better keep good watch, if you wish to save your scalps. I warn you that we are in an enemy's country."

The peons assured the Tigrero that they would redouble their vigilance. The two men remained seated opposite each other.

"Well," Don Sylva began, "have you learned anything?"

"All that it was possible to learn, Don Sylva," the Tigrero sharply replied. "Were it otherwise I should be a scurvy hunter."

"Is the information you have obtained favourable?"

"That depends on your future plans. The French have been here, and bivouacked for several days. During their stay in the ruins they were vigorously attacked by the Apaches whom, however, they succeeded in repulsing."

"I thank you for your information, which proves to me that we were not mistaken, but followed the right trail. Now, can you complete your information by telling me if the French have long left the ruins?"

"Those questions are very easy to answer. The free company left their bivouac yesterday, a few moments after sunrise, and entered the desert."

"The desert!" the haciendero exclaimed.

There was a silence of some moments, during which both men reflected. At length Don Sylva took the word.

"It is impossible," he said.

"Still, it is so."

"But it is an act of madness."

"I do not deny it."

"Oh, the unhappy men!"

"They are lost!"

"If they escape, Heaven will perform a miracle in their favour."

"I think with you; but it is now an accomplished fact, which no recriminations of ours can alter; so, Don Sylva, I believe that the wisest thing is to trouble ourselves no more about them."

"Is that your notion?"

"It is," the Tigrero replied carelessly. "I propose to remain here two or three days, and see if anything turns up. After that time, if we have seen or heard nothing, we will remount, and return to Guetzalli."

The haciendero shook his head like a man who has just formed an irrevocable determination.

"Then you will go alone, Don Martial," he said dryly.

"What!" the latter exclaimed. "What is your meaning?"

"I mean that I shall not turn back."

Don Martial was confounded by this answer.

"What do you intend doing, then?"

"Can you not guess that? Why did we come to this place? For what purpose have we been travelling so long?"

"Excuse me, Don Sylva, but the question is now changed."

"Now explain to me your notion."

"It is this, Don Sylva. So long as we only wandered about the prairies, at the risk of being devoured by wild beasts, I bowed my head, without attempting to oppose your designs. Even now, were you and I alone, I would bow without a murmur before the firm determination that animates you. But reflect that you have your daughter with you."

Don Sylva made no reply, so the Tigrero continued,—

"Our party is weak. We have provisions for only a few days; and you know, once in the Del Norte, we find no more water or game."

"All that you tell me is correct, I am well aware; still, I cannot follow your advice. Listen to me in your turn, Don Martial. The Count de Lhorailles is my friend; he will soon be my son-in-law. It is my duty to save him, and I will attempt it, whatever may happen."

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Don Sylva made no reply, so the Tigrero continued,—

"Our party is weak. We have provisions for only a few days; and you know, once in the Del Norte, we find no more water or game."

"All that you tell me is correct, I am well aware; still, I cannot follow your advice. Listen to me in your turn, Don Martial. The Count de Lhorailles is my friend; he will soon be my son-in-law. It is my duty to save him, and I will attempt it, whatever may happen."

"Since matters are so, Don Sylva, I will no longer try to combat a resolution so

firmly made. I will not tell you that the man to whom you give your daughter is an adventurer. All these things, and many others, I could supply you with proofs of; but you would not believe me. You wish to enter the desert: I will follow you. Whatever may happen, you will find me at your side ready to defend and aid you."

At this moment the curtain of Dona Anita's room was raised; the young girl came out, knelt before her father, and turning to the Tigrero,—

"Speak, Don Martial," she said. "Perhaps my father will pardon me."

"Pardon you!" the haciendero said. "What is the meaning of this? What fault have you committed?"

"A fault for which I am alone culpable, Don Sylva. I deceived you disgracefully: it was I who carried off your daughter."

"What!" the haciendero shouted with an outburst of fury.

"Passion does not reason. I will only say one word in my defence: I love your daughter!"

"Pardon, father!" the poor girl said in a weak voice.

The haciendero made a gesture.

"Oh!" the Tigrero said quickly, "be generous, Don Sylva. Do not spurn us."

"Father," Dona Anita continued in a tearful voice, "I love him. Still, when we left the colony, we might have fled, and abandoned you; but we did not do it."

"You see," said the haciendero, severely, "I can no longer hesitate. I must save the Count de Lhorailles at all hazards, else I should be your accomplice."

The Tigero walked in great agitation up and down the hall; his eyebrows were contracted.

"Yes," he said in a broken voice, "yes, he must be saved. No matter what becomes of me afterwards."

"Aid me frankly and loyally in my search, and I will pardon you," Don Sylva said gravely. "My honour is compromised by your fault."

"Thanks, Don Sylva; you will have no cause to repent," the Tigrero nobly replied.

"My poor child!" he said to his daughter, "I forgive you. Alas! who knows whether in a few days I shall not have, in my turn, to ask your forgiveness?"

"Oh, how kind you are, and how I love you, father!" she cried from her heart. "Fear nothing. Whatever sufferings the future may have in store for me, I will endure them without a murmur."

"When do you intend starting?" said Don Martial, stifling a sigh.

"To-morrow, if possible."

"Be it so. Let us trust in Heaven."

After conversing for some short time longer, and making their final arrangements, Don Sylva wrapped himself up in his coverings, and soon fell asleep.

"Provided that Cuchairès has not fulfilled my orders!" the Tigrero muttered.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MAN HUNT.

On the next morning at daybreak the little band quitted the Casa Grande, and two hours later entered the Del Norte. At the sight of the desert the maiden felt her heart contract; a secret presentiment seemed to warn her that the future would be fatal.

The temperature was sultry, the sky blue, not a breath of wind was stirring; on the sand might still be seen the deep footsteps of the count's free troop.

"We are on the right road," the haciendero said.

"Yes," the Tigrero muttered; "and it will remain so till the temporal is unchained."

"Then," Dona Anita remarked, "may Heaven come to our aid!"

"Amen!" all the travellers exclaimed.

Several hours passed away; the weather remained fine. At times the travellers saw, at a great distance above their heads, innumerable swarms of birds proceeding toward the hot regions, or *las tierras calientes*, as they are called in that country, and hastening to cross the desert. But everywhere and ever nothing was visible save a gray and melancholy sand, or gloomy rocks wildly piled on each other like the ruins of an unknown and antediluvian world.

The caravan, when night set in, camped under the shelter of a block of granite, lighting a poor fire, hardly sufficient to protect them from the icy cold which, in these regions, weighs upon nature at night. Don Martial rode incessantly on the sides of the small band, watching over their safety with filial solicitude, never remaining a moment at rest, in spite of the urging of Don Sylva and the entreaties of the maiden.

"No!" he constantly answered; "on my vigilance your safety depends. Let me act as I think proper."

Gradually the traces left by the troops became less visible, and at length disappeared entirely. One evening, at the moment the travellers were forming their camp at the foot of an immense rock, which formed a species of roof over their heads, the haciendero pointed out to Don Martial a thin white vapour, which stood out prominently against the blue sky.

"The sky is losing its brightness," he said; "we shall probably soon have a change of weather."

The Tigrero shook his head.

"No," he said, "you are mistaken. Your eyes are not so accustomed as mine to consult the sky. That is not a cloud."

"What is it, then?"

"The smoke of a *bois de vache* fire."

"Oh!" the haciendero said. "Can we be on the trail of those friends we have lost so long?"

Don Martial remained silent. He minutely examined the smoke, which was soon mingled with the atmosphere. At length he said,—

"That smoke bodes us no good. Our friends, as you call them, are Frenchmen; that is to say, profoundly ignorant of desert life. Were they near us, it would be as easy to see them as that rock down there. They would have lighted not one fire, but twenty braseros. They do not select their wood: whether it be dry or damp they care little."

ou conclude from this?"
hat the fire you discovered has been lit by savages. The men, whoever they e, who lit that fire, have left nothing to chance; they have calculated and n everything, and I am greatly mistaken if they are not enemies."
what distance do you suppose them from us?"
ur leagues at the most. What is that distance in the desert, when it can be t so easily in a straight line?"
hen your advice is?" the haciendero asked.
eigh well my words, Don Sylva; above all, do not give them an interpreta- ffering from mine. By a prodigy almost unexampled in the Del Norte, we w been crossing the desert for nearly three weeks, and nothing has happened able our security; for a week we have been, moreover, seeking a trail which it ossible to come on again."
uite true."
have, therefore, worked out this conclusion, which I believe to be correct, and you will approve, I am convinced. The French only accidentally formed the tion of entering the desert; they only did it to pursue the Apaches. Is not our view?"
is."
ery good. Consequently they crossed it in a straight line. A pursuit, you as well as I, is a chase in which each tries to arrive first."
hen you suppose——?" Don Sylva interrupted him.
am certain that the French left the desert long ago, and are now coursing over ains of Apacheria."
low so?"
ou will soon understand. The Apaches have the greatest interest in keeping rench from their hunting-grounds. They have probably lit this fire to deceive and compel their return."
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Well," he said, presently; "and what conclusion do you arrive at from all "
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CHAPTER XXI.

THE MAN HUNT.

On the next morning at daybreak the little band quitted the Casa Grande, and two hours later entered the Del Norte. At the sight of the desert the maiden felt her heart contract; a secret presentiment seemed to warn her that the future would be fatal.

The temperature was sultry, the sky blue, not a breath of wind was stirring; on the sand might still be seen the deep footsteps of the count's free troop.

"We are on the right road," the haciendero said.

"Yes," the Tigrero muttered; "and it will remain so till the temporal is unchained."

"Then," Dona Anita remarked, "may Heaven come to our aid!"

"Amen!" all the travellers exclaimed.

Several hours passed away; the weather remained fine. At times the travellers saw, at a great distance above their heads, innumerable swarms of birds proceeding toward the hot regions, or *las tierras calientes*, as they are called in that country, and hastening to cross the desert. But everywhere and ever nothing was visible save a gray and melancholy sand, or gloomy rocks wildly piled on each other like the ruins of an unknown and antediluvian world.

The caravan, when night set in, camped under the shelter of a block of granite lighting a poor fire, hardly sufficient to protect them from the icy cold which, in these regions, weighs upon nature at night. Don Martial rode incessantly on the sides of the small band, watching over their safety with filial solicitude, never remaining a moment at rest, in spite of the urging of Don Sylva and the entreaties of the maiden.

"No!" he constantly answered; "on my vigilance your safety depends. Let me act as I think proper."

Gradually the traces left by the troops became less visible, and at length disappeared entirely. One evening, at the moment the travellers were forming their camp at the foot of an immense rock, which formed a species of roof over their heads, the haciendero pointed out to Don Martial a thin white vapour, which stood out prominently against the blue sky.

"The sky is losing its brightness," he said; "we shall probably soon have a change of weather."

The Tigrero shook his head.

"No," he said, "you are mistaken. Your eyes are not so accustomed as mine to consult the sky. That is not a cloud."

"What is it, then?"

"The smoke of a *bois de vache* fire."

"Oh!" the haciendero said. "Can we be on the trail of those friends we have lost so long?"

Don Martial remained silent. He minutely examined the smoke, which was soon mingled with the atmosphere. At length he said,—

"That smoke bodes us no good. Our friends, as you call them, are Frenchmen; that is to say, profoundly ignorant of desert life. Were they near us, it would be as easy to see them as that rock down there. They would have lighted not one fire, but twenty braseros. They do not select their wood: whether it be dry or damp they care little."

"You conclude from this?"

"That the fire you discovered has been lit by savages. The men, whoever they may be, who lit that fire, have left nothing to chance; they have calculated and foreseen everything, and I am greatly mistaken if they are not enemies."

"At what distance do you suppose them from us?"

"Four leagues at the most. What is that distance in the desert, when it can be crossed so easily in a straight line?"

"Then your advice is?" the haciendero asked.

"Weigh well my words, Don Sylva; above all, do not give them an interpretation differing from mine. By a prodigy almost unexampled in the Del Norte, we have now been crossing the desert for nearly three weeks, and nothing has happened to trouble our security; for a week we have been, moreover, seeking a trail which it is impossible to come on again."

"Quite true."

"I have, therefore, worked out this conclusion, which I believe to be correct, and which you will approve, I am convinced. The French only accidentally formed the resolution of entering the desert; they only did it to pursue the Apaches. Is not that your view?"

"It is."

"Very good. Consequently they crossed it in a straight line. A pursuit, you know as well as I, is a chase in which each tries to arrive first."

"Then you suppose——?" Don Sylva interrupted him.

"I am certain that the French left the desert long ago, and are now coursing over the plains of Apacheria."

"How so?"

"You will soon understand. The Apaches have the greatest interest in keeping the French from their hunting-grounds. They have probably lit this fire to deceive them, and compel their return."

The haciendero was thoughtful. The reasons Don Martial offered him seemed correct.

"Well," he said, presently; "and what conclusion do you arrive at from all this?"

"That we should do wrong," Don Martial said resolutely, "in losing more time here in search of people who are no longer in the desert, and running the risk of being caught by a tempest, which every passing hour renders more imminent in a country like this, which is continually exposed to hurricanes."

"Then you would return?"

"By no means. I would push on, and enter Apacheria as quickly as possible."

"Yes, that appears to me correct enough; but we are a long way yet from the prairies."

"Not so far as you suppose; but let us break off our conversation at this point. I wish to go out and examine that fire more closely."

"Be prudent."

"Is not your safety concerned?" the Tigrero said, as he bent a gentle and mournful glance on Dona Anita. He rose, saddled his horse in a second, and started at a gallop.

"Brave heart!" she murmured, on seeing him disappear in the mist. The haciendero sighed, but made no further reply, and his head fell pensively on his chest.

Don Martial pressed on rapidly by the flickering light of the moon, which spread its sickly and fantastic rays over the desolate scene. At times he perceived heavy rocks, dumb and gloomy sentinels, whose gigantic shadows striped the gray sand

for a long distance; or else enormous ahuehuelts, whose branches were laden with that thick moss called Spaniard's beard, which fell in long festoons, and was agitated by the slightest breath of wind.

After nearly an hour and a half's march the Tigrero stopped his horse, dismounted, and looked attentively around him. He soon found what he sought. A short distance from him the wind and rain had hollowed a rather deep ravine; he drew his horse into it, fastened it to an enormous stone, bound up its nostrils to prevent it neighing, and went off, after throwing his rifle over his shoulder.

From the spot where he was this moment standing the fire was visible, and the red flash it traced in the air stood out clearly in the darkness. Round the fire several shadows were reclining, which the Tigrero recognized at the first glance as Indians. The Mexican had not deceived himself; his experience had not failed him. They were certainly red-skins encamped there in the desert at a short distance from his party. But who were they? Were they friends or enemies? He must assure himself about that fact.

Don Martial did not recoil from his task. Not far from the red-skins' bivouac was an enormous block of granite, at the foot of which three or four ahuehuelts had sprung up, and in the course of time so entangled their branches in one another that they formed, at a certain distance up the rock, a thorough thicket. The Tigrero lay down on the ground, and gently, inch by inch, employing his knees and elbows, he glided in the direction of the rock, skilfully taking advantage of the shadow thrown by the rock itself. It took the Tigrero nearly half an hour to cross the forty yards that still separated him from the rock. At length he reached it: he then stopped to draw breath, and uttered a sigh of satisfaction.

The Indians Don Martial at once recognized to be Apaches. His forebodings, then, were realised. Round a *bois de vache* fire, which produced a large flame, while only allowing a slight thread of smoke to escape, several chiefs were gravely crouching on their heels, and smoking their calumets while warming themselves, for the cold was sharp. Don Martial distinguished in the midst of them the Black Bear. The sachem's face was gloomy; he seemed in a terrible passion; he frequently raised his head anxiously, and fixing his piercing glance on the space, interrogated the darkness. A noise of horse-hoofs was heard, and a mounted Indian entered the lighted part of the camp. After dismounting, the Indian approached the fire, crouched near his comrades, lighted his calumet, and began smoking with a perfectly calm face, although the dust that covered him, and his panting chest, showed that he must have made a long and painful journey.

On his arrival the Black Bear gazed fixedly at him, and then went on smoking without saying a word. At length the new comer drew a final puff of smoke, which he sent forth through his mouth and nostrils, and returned his calumet to his girdle. The Black Bear turned to him.

"The Little Panther has been long," he said.

As this was not a question the Indian limited himself to replying with a bow.

"The vultures are soaring in large flocks over the desert," the chief presently continued; "the coyotes are sharpening their bent claws. Has my son seen nothing?"

"The Little Panther is a renowned warrior. He has fulfilled the mission his father intrusted to him."

"Wah! what are the Long-knives doing?"

"The Long-knives are dogs."

The chiefs smiled with pride at this boast.

"The Little Panther has seen their camp," the Indian continued; "he has counted them. They cry like women, and lament like weak children."

And with a gesture, marked with a certain degree of nobility, the Indian raised

cotton shirt which fell from his neck about half way down his thighs, and displayed two bleeding scalps fastened to his waist-belt.

"Wah!" the chiefs exclaimed joyfully, "the Little Panther has fought bravely."

The Black Bear made the warrior a sign to hand him the scalps. He unfastened them and gave them. The sachem examined them attentively.

"*Asch'eth* (it is good)," he said presently; "my brother has killed a Long-knife and a Yori."

And he returned the scalps to the warrior.

"Have the pale-faces discovered the trail of the Apaches?"

"The pale-faces are moles; they are only good in their great stone villages."

"What has my son done?"

"The Panther executed the orders of the sachem point by point."

"Good! my son has done well. What next?"

"When the pale-faces had gone far enough the Panther left them, after killing them."

"My son is weary: the hour of rest has arrived for him."

"Not yet," the Indian replied seriously.

"Wah! let my son explain."

At this remark Don Martial, who was listening attentively to all that was said, felt his heart contract.

"There are others beside the Long-knives in the desert; the Little Panther has discovered another trail."

"Another trail?"

"Yes. It is not very visible: there are seven horses and three mules in all."

"Wah! I await what my brother is about to tell me."

"Six Yori warriors, having a woman with them."

The chief's eyes flashed fire.

"A pale-faced woman?" he asked.

The Indian bowed in affirmation.

"The Black Bear is not mistaken," he said; "he smelt the scent of blood; his Apache sons will have a splendid chase. To-morrow at *endi-tah* (sunrise) the warriors will mount. The sachem's lodge is empty. I have spoken."

The warriors bowed silently, rose one after the other, and went to lie down on the sand a short distance off. Within five minutes they were all in a deep sleep. The Black Bear alone watched. On what was he meditating?

Don Martial read his thoughts, and felt a shudder of terror. He remained for another half-hour motionless in his hiding-place, lest he might run the risk of discovery. Then he went down again as he had come. At length he reached again, all safe and sound, the spot where he had left his horse.

For some time the Tigrero let the bridle hang loosely on his noble animal's neck, went slowly onwards, revolving in his mind all he had heard, and searching for the means he should employ to shield his companions from the frightful danger that menaced them. His perplexity was extreme: he knew not what to decide on.

The girl must be saved at any risk. This thought incessantly returned to the Tigrero's perplexed mind, and gnawed at his heart like a searing iron: he felt himself affected by a cold rage on considering the material impossibilities that rose so implacably before him. How to save the girl?

When he reached the camp he found every one asleep save the peon who was mounting guard. It was about one o'clock in the morning. The Apaches would not set out before daybreak, and he had, therefore, about four hours left him for action. He resolved to profit by them.

The Tigrero began by carefully rubbing down his horse to restore the elasticity to its limbs, for he would need all its speed; then, aided by the peons, he loaded

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The Tigrero began by carefully rubbing down his horse to restore the elasticity to its limbs, for he would need all its speed; then, aided by the peons, he loaded

the mules and saddled the horses. This done, he aroused Don Sylva and his daughter.

"To horse! to horse!" he said in a voice that admitted of no reply

"What's the matter?" the haciendero asked.

"That if we do not start at once we are lost!"

"How—what do you mean?"

"To horse! to horse! Every moment we waste here brings us nearer to death."

"In Heaven's name tell me what the matter is!"

"You shall know. Come, come."

Without listening to anything, he compelled the haciendero to mount. Dona Anita had done so already. The Tigrero looked around for the last time, and gave the signal for departure. The party started at their horses' topmost speed.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE APACHES.

NOTHING is so mournful as a night march through the desert, especially under such circumstances as hurried our party on. Night is the mother of phantoms; in the darkness, the gayest landscapes become sinister—everything assumes a form to startle the traveller. The moon, however brilliant the light it diffuses may be, imparts to objects a fantastic appearance and mournful hues which cause the bravest to tremble.

Sleep is perhaps the most tyrannical and imperious necessity of man; it makes him despise and forget all else. The man overpowered by sleep will give way to it, no matter where he is, or what danger menaces him. Hunger and thirst may be subdued for a while by strength of will and courage, but sleep cannot. It is impossible to contend against it. It strangles you in its iron claws, and in a few moments hurls you down.

With the exception of Don Martial, whose eye was sharp and mind clear, the other members of the party resembled sonambulists. Hanging to their horses as well as they could, with eyes shut and thoughts wandering, they hurried on unconsciously, a prey to that horrible nightmare which is neither sleeping nor waking, but only the torpor of the senses and the oblivion of the mind.

This lasted the whole night. They had travelled ten leagues, and were utterly exhausted. Still at sunrise, beneath the influence of the warm rays, they gradually shook off their heaviness, opened their eyes, looked curiously around them, and an infinity of questions rose from the heart to the lips, as generally happens in such a case.

The party had reached the banks of the Rio Gila, whose muddy waters form, on

this side, the desert frontier. Don Martial, after carefully examining the spot where he was, stopped on the bank.

The appearance of the country had completely changed. On the other bank of the river a thick, strong grass covered the ground, and immense virgin forests grew on the horizon.

"Ouf!" Don Sylva said, rolling on the ground with an expression of great satisfaction, "what a journey! I am worn out. I could not stand it much longer. I am neither hungry nor thirsty. I will go to sleep."

While saying this the haciendero had arranged himself in the posture most agreeable for a nap.

"Not yet, Don Sylva," the Tigrero said sharply, and shaking him by the arm.

"Go to the deuce! I want to sleep, I tell you."

"Very good," Don Martial made answer coldly; "but if you and Dona Anita fall into the hands of the Apaches you will not make me responsible for it?"

"Eh?" the haciendero said, "what are you saying about Apaches?"

"I tell you again that the Apaches are in pursuit of us."

"*Canarios!* we must fly," Don Sylva exclaimed.

As for Dona Anita, little troubled her at this moment. She was fast asleep.

"Let the horses eat, and then we will start. We have a long way to go. These few moments of rest will allow Dona Anita to regain her strength."

"Poor child!" the haciendero muttered. "I am the cause of what has happened."

"What use is recrimination, Don Sylva? We are all to blame. Let us forget the past."

"Yes, you are right. What need discussing things that are done? Now that I am perfectly awake tell me what you did during the night?"

"My story will be short, Don Sylva; but you, I believe, will find it very interesting. But you shall judge for yourself. After leaving you last night, I found I was not mistaken: that fire, as I supposed, was a snare laid by the Apaches. I managed to crawl up to them unnoticed, and hear their conversation. Do you know what they said?"

"By my faith I have little notion what such idiots as those talk about."

"One of their runners was telling the sachem the result of a mission entrusted to him. Among other things he mentioned that he had discovered a pale-face trail, and that among the pale-faces was a woman."

"*Caspita!*" the haciendero exclaimed in terror.

"The more so because I heard the chief make this reply. Be attentive, Don Sylva——"

"I am listening: go on."

"The chief's lodge is empty; he wants a white woman to occupy it."

"*Caramba!*"

"Yes. Then, finding I had learnt sufficient of the expedition the red-skins were undertaking, I slipped away and regained our camp as soon as possible. You know the——"

"Yes, I know the rest, Don Martial," the haciendero said almost affectionately; "and I thank you most sincerely."

"I have done nothing but what I should do, Don Sylva. Have I not sworn to devote my life to you?"

"Yes, my friend, and you keep your vow nobly."

Since the haciendero had known Don Martial this was the first time he had spoke openly with him, and gave him the title of friend. The Tigrero was touched by this expression; and if he had hitherto felt some slight prejudice against Don Sylva, it was suddenly dissipated, and only left in his heart a feeling of profound gratitude.

Don Anita awoke during this conversation, and it was with an indescribable joy that she heard them talking thus amicably together. When her father told her the cause of the hasty journey she had been compelled to undertake in the middle of the night, she warmly thanked Don Martial. The Tigrero, delighted at seeing his devotion appreciated as it deserved to be, forgot all his fatigues. So soon as the horses were saddled they mounted again.

"I leave myself in your hands, Don Martial," the haciendero said: "you alone can save us."

"With the help of Heaven I shall succeed," the Tigrero replied passionately.

They entered the river, crossed, and landed. The party had left the desert. Before them stretched those immense prairies. They are no longer sterile and desolate plains, denuded of wood and water, but a luxuriant nature, with an extraordinary productive force—trees, flowers, grass; countless birds singing joyously beneath the foliage; animals of every description running, browsing, and sporting, in the midst of these natural prairies.

The travellers yielded instinctively to the feeling of comfort produced by the sight of this splendid prairie, when compared with the desolate desert they had just quitted, and in which they had wandered about so long hap-hazard. This contrast was full of charms for them: they felt their courage rekindled, and hope returning to their hearts. About eleven o'clock the horses were so fatigued that the travellers were compelled to encamp, in order to give them a few hours' rest, and thus pass the great heats of the day. Don Martial chose the top of a wooded hill, whence the prairie could be surveyed, while they remained completely concealed among the trees.

The Tigrero, would not permit them, however, to light a fire to cook food, as the smoke would have caused their retreat to be discovered; and in their present position they could not exercise too much prudence, as it was evident that the Apaches would have started in pursuit at sunrise. Those crafty bloodhounds must be thrown off the scent. In spite of all the precautions he had taken, the Tigrero could not flatter himself with the hope of having foiled them; for the red-skins are so clever in discovering a trail. After eating a few hasty mouthfuls he allowed his companions to enjoy a rest they needed so greatly, and rose to go on the watch.

This man appeared made of iron—fatigue took no hold on him: his will was so firm that he resisted everything, and his desire to save the woman he loved endowed him with a supernatural strength. He slowly descended the hill, examining each shrub, only advancing with extreme prudence, and with his ear open to every sound, however slight. So soon as he reached the plain, certain that his presence would be concealed by the tall grass, in which he entirely disappeared, he hastened at full speed toward a sombre and dense primeval forest, whose trees approached almost close to the hill. This forest was really what it appeared to be—a virgin forest. The trees and leaves intertwined formed an inextricable curtain, through which a hatchet would have been required to cut a passage. Had he been alone, the Tigrero would not have been greatly embarrassed by this apparently insurmountable obstacle. Skilful and powerful as he was, he would have travelled 'twixt earth and sky, by passing from branch to branch, as he had often done before. But what a man so desolate as himself could do was not to be expected from a frail and weak woman.

For an instant the Tigrero felt his heart fail him, and his courage give way. But this despair was only momentary. Don Martial drew himself up proudly, and suddenly regained all his energy. He continued to advance toward the forest, looking round like a wild beast on the watch for prey. Suddenly he uttered a stifled cry of joy. He had found what he had been seeking without any hope of finding it.

Before him, beneath a thick dome of verdure, ran one of those narrow paths formed by wild beasts in going to water, and which it required the Tigrero's practised eye to detect. He resolutely turned aside into this path. Like all those made by wild beasts,

it took innumerable turnings, incessantly coming back on itself. After following it for a sufficient length of time, the Tigrero went back, and re-ascended the hill.

His companions, anxious at his lengthened absence, were impatiently expecting him. Each noticed his return with delight. He told them what he had been doing, and the track he had discovered. While Don Martial had been on the search, one of his peons, however, had made, on the side of this very hill, a discovery most valuable at such a moment to our travellers. This man, while wandering about the neighbourhood to kill time, had found the entrance to a cave which he had not dared to explore, not knowing whether he might not suddenly find himself face to face with a wild beast.

Don Martial quivered with joy at this news. He seized an *ocote* torch, and ordered the peon to lead him to the cavern. It was only a few paces distant, and on that side of the hill which faced the river. The entrance was so obstructed by shrubs and parasitic plants, that it was evident no living being had ever penetrated it for many a long year. The Tigrero moved the shrubs with the greatest care, in order not to injure them, and glided into the cavern. The entrance was tolerably lofty, though rather narrow. Before going in Don Martial struck a light and kindled the torch.

This cavern was one of those natural grottos, so many of which are found in these regions. The walls were lofty and dry, the ground covered with fine sand. It evidently received air from imperceptible fissures, as no mephitic exhalation escaped from it, and breathing was quite easy; in a word, although it was rather gloomy, it was habitable. It grew gradually lower to a species of hall, in the centre of which was a gulf, the bottom of which Don Martial could not see, though he held down his torch. He looked round him, saw a lump of rock, probably detached from the roof, and threw it into the abyss.

For a long time he heard the stone dashing against the sides, and then the noise of a body falling into water. Don Martial knew all he wanted to know. He stepped past the gulf, and advanced along a narrow shelving passage. After walking for about ten minues along it, he saw light a considerable distance ahead. The grotto had two outlets.

"We are saved!" he said to his companions. "Follow me: we have not an instant to lose in reaching the refuge Providence so generously offers us."

They followed him.

"What shall we do, though, Don Sylva asked "with the horses?"

"Do not trouble yourselves about them; I will conceal them. Place in the grotto our provisions, for it is probable we shall be forced to remain here some time."

Each set to work with that feverish ardour produced by the hope of escaping a danger; and at the end of an hour, at most, the baggage, provisions, and men had all disappeared in the cavern. Don Martial drew the bushes over the entrance, to hide the traces of his companions' passage, and breathed with that delight caused by the success of a daring project; then he returned to the crest of the hill.

He fastened the horses and mules together with his reata, and descended to the plain: he proceeded toward the forest, and entered the path he had previously discovered. It was very narrow, and the horses could only proceed in single file, and with extreme difficulty. At length he reached a species of clearing, where he abandoned the poor animals, leaving them all the forage, which he had taken care to pack on the mules. Don Martial was well awar that the horses would stray but a short distance from the spot where he left them, and that when they were wanted it would be easy to find them.

These various occupations consumed a good deal of time, and the day was considerably advanced when the Tigrero finally quitted the forest. The sun, very low on the horizon, appeared like a ball of fire, nearly on a level with the ground. The

shadow of the trees was disproportionately elongated. The evening breeze was beginning to rise. A few hoarse cries issuing at intervals from the depths of the forest, announced the speedy re-awakening of the wild beasts, those denizens of the desert which, during the night, are its absolute kings.

On reaching the crest of the hill, and before entering the grotto, Don Martial surveyed the horizon by the last rays of the expiring sun. Suddenly he turned pale; a nervous shudder passed through his frame; his eyes, dilated by terror, were obstinately fixed on the river; and he muttered in a low voice, and stamping with fury,—

"Already? The demons!"

What the Tigrero had seen was really startling. A band of Indian horsemen was traversing the river at the precise spot where he and his companions had crossed a few hours previously. Don Martial followed their movements with growing alarm. On arriving at the river bank, without any hesitation or delay, they took up his trail.

The Tigrero felt his heart breaking, and half mad with grief, rushed into the grotto. On seeing him enter thus with livid features, the haciendero and his daughter hurried to meet him.

"What is the matter?" they asked.

"We are lost!" he exclaimed with despair. "Here are the Apaches!"

"The Apaches!" they muttered with terror.

"O heavens, save me!" Dona Anita said, falling on her knees and fervently clasping her hands.

"Come," shouted the Tigrero, "follow me. Pehaps one chance of salvation is still left us."

And he hurried toward the extremity of the grotto, all eagerly following him. They hurried on for some time in this way. Dona Anita, almost fainting, leaned her lovely head on the Tigrero's shoulder. He still ran on.

"Come," he said, "we shall be saved."

His companions uttered a shout of joy; they had perceived a gleam of daylight before them. Suddenly, at the moment Don Martial reached the entrance, and was about to rush forth, a man appeared. It was the Black Bear.

The Tigrero leaped back with the howl of a wild beast.

"Wah!" the Apache said, with a mocking voice, "my brother knows that I love this woman, and to please me he hastens to bring her to me."

"You have not got her yet, demon!" Don Martial shouted. "Come and take her."

Rapidly approaching footsteps were heard in the depths of the cavern. The Mexicans were caught between two fires. The Black Bear, with his eye fixed on the Tigrero, watched his every movement. Suddenly he bounded forward like a tiger cat, uttering his war yell. The Tigrero fired both pistols at him, and seized him round the waist. The two men rolled on the ground, intertwined like two serpents, while Don Sylva and the peons fought desperately with the other Indians.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE WOOD-RANGERS.

We will now return to certain persons of this story, whom we have too long forgotten.

Although the French had remained masters of the field, and succeeded in driving back their savage enemies when they attacked the hacienda upon the Rio Gila, they did not hide from themselves the fact that they did not owe this unhoped-for victory solely to their own courage. The final charge made by the Comanches, under the orders of Eagle-head, had alone decided the victory. Hence, when the enemy disappeared, the Count de Lhorailles, with uncommon generosity and frankness, especially in a man of his character, warmly thanked the Comanches, and made the hunters the most magnificent offers.

But Belhumeur told him they had no other motive for their conduct than that of helping fellow-countrymen. Now that all was finished, and the French would be long free from any attacks on the part of the savages, they had only one thing more to do—take leave of the count so soon as possible, and continue their journey. The count, however, induced them to spend two more days at the colony.

Dona Anita and her father had disappeared in so mysterious a manner, that the French, but little accustomed to Indian tricks, and completely ignorant of the manner of discovering or following a trail in the desert, were incapable of going in search of the two persons who had been carried off. The count, in his mind, had built on the experience of Eagle-head and the sagacity of his warriors to find traces of the haciendero and his daughter. He explained to the hunters, in the fullest details, the service he hoped to obtain from them, and they thought they had no right to refuse it.

The next morning at daybreak Eagle-head divided his detachment into four troops, each commanded by a renowned warrior, and after giving the men their instructions, he sent them off in four different directions. The Comanches beat up the country with that cleverness and skill the red-skins possess to so eminent a degree, but all was useless. The four troops returned one after the other to the hacienda without making any discovery. Though they had gone over the ground for a radius of about twenty leagues round the colony—though not a tuft of grass or a shrub had escaped their minute investigations—the trail could not be found. We know the reason—water alone keeps no trace. Don Sylva and his daughter had been carried down with the current of the Rio Gila.

"You see," Belhumeur said to the count, "we have done what was humanly possible to recover the persons carried off during the fight; it is evident that the ravishers embarked them on the river, and carried them a long distance ere they landed. Who can say where they are now? The red-skins go fast, especially when flying; they have an immense advance on us, as the ill-success of our efforts proves: it would be madness to hope to catch them. Allow us, then, to take our leave: perhaps, during our passage across the prairie, we may obtain information which may presently prove useful to you."

"I will no longer encroach on your kindness," the count replied, courteously. "Go whenever you think proper, caballeros; but I am also going to leave the colony, and we may perhaps meet in the desert."

The next morning the hunters and the Comanches quitted the hacienda, and

buried themselves in the prairie. In the evening Eagle-head had the camp formed, and the fires lighted. After supper, when all were about to retire for the night, the sachem sent the *hachesto*, or public crier, to summon the chiefs to the council fire.

"My pale brothers will take a place near the chiefs," Eagle-head said, addressing the Canadian and the Frenchman.

The latter accepted with a nod, and sat down by the brosero among the Comanche chiefs, who were already waiting, silent and reserved, for the communication from their great sachem. When Eagle-head had taken his seat he made a sign to the pipe-bearer. The latter entered the circle, respectfully carrying in his hand the calumet of medicine, whose stem was adorned with feathers and a multitude of bells, while the bowl was hollowed out of a white stone only found in the Rocky Mountains.

The calumet was filled and lighted.

The pipe-bearer, so soon as he entered the circle, turned the bowl of the pipe to the four cardinal points, murmuring in a low voice mysterious words, intended to invoke the good-will of the Wacondah, the Master of Life, and remove from the mind of the chiefs the malignant influence of the first man. Then, still holding the bowl in his hand, he presented the mouthpiece to Eagle-head, saying in a loud and impressive voice,—

"My father is the first sachem of the valorous nation of the Comanches. Wisdom resides in him. Although the snows of age have not yet frozen the thoughts in his brain, like all men, he is subject to error. Let my father reflect ere he speak: for the words which pass his lips must be such as the Comanches can hear."

"My son has spoken well," the sachem replied.

He took the tube, and smoked silently for a few moments; then he removed the stem from his lips, and handed it to his nearest neighbour. The pipe thus passed round the circle, and not a chief uttered a word. When each had smoked, and all the tobacco in the bowl was consumed, the pipe-bearer shook out the ash into his left hand, and threw it into the brazier, exclaiming,—

"The chiefs are assembled here in council. Their words are sacred. Wacondah has heard our prayer. It is granted. Woe to the man who forgets that conscience must be his only guide!"

After uttering these words with great dignity the pipe-bearer left the circle, murmuring in a low, though perfectly distinct voice,—

"Just as the ash I have thrown into the fire has disappeared for ever, so the words of the chiefs must be sacred, and never be repeated outside the sachems' circle. My fathers can speak; the council is opened."

The pipe-bearer departed after this warning. Then Eagle-head rose, and, after surveying all the warriors present, took the word:

"Comanche chiefs and warriors," he said, "many moons have passed away since I left the villages of my nation; many moons will again pass ere the all-powerful Wacondah will permit me to sit at the council fire of the great Comanche sachems. The blood has ever flowed red in my veins, and my heart has never worn a skin for my brothers. The words which pass my lips are spoken by the will of the Great Spirit. He knows how I have kept up my love for you. The Comanche nation is powerful; it is the Queen of the Prairies. Its hunting-grounds cover the whole world. What need has it to ally itself with other nations to avenge insults? Does the unclean coyote retire into the den of the haughty jaguar? Does the owl lay its eggs in the eagle's nest? Why should the Comanche walk on the war-path with the Apache dogs? The Apaches are

cowardly and treacherous women. I thank my brothers not only for having broken with them, but also for having helped me to defeat them. Now my heart is sad, a mist covers my mind, because I must separate from my brothers. Let them accept my farewell. Let the Jester pity me, because I shall walk in the shadow far from him. The sunbeams, however burning they may be, will not warm me. I have spoken. Have I spoken well, powerful men?"

Eagle-head sat down amid a murmur of grief, and concealed his face behind the skirt of his buffalo robe. There was a great silence in the assembly; the Jester seemed to interrogate the other chiefs with a glance. At length he rose, and took the word in his turn to reply to the sachem.

"The Jester is young," he said; "his head is good, though he does not possess the great wisdom of his father. Eagle-head is a sachem beloved bv the Wacondah. Why has the Master of Life brought the chief back among the warriors of his nation? Is it that he should leave them again almost immediately? No; the Master of Life loves his Comanche sons. He could not have desired that. The warriors need a wise and experienced chief to lead them on the war-path, and instruct them round the council fire. My father's head is gray; he will teach and guide the warriors. The Jester cannot do so; he is still too young, and wants experience. Where my father goes his sons will go; what my father wishes his sons will wish. But never let him speak again about leaving them. Let him disperse the cloud that obscures his mind. His sons implore it by the mouth of the Jester—that child he brought up, whom he loved so much formerly, and of whom he made a man. I have spoken: here is my wampum. Have I spoken well, powerful men?"

After uttering the last words the chief threw a collar of wampum at Eagle-head's feet, and sat down again.

"The great sachem must remain with his sons," all the warriors shouted, as, in their turn, they threw down their wampun collars.

Eagle-head rose with an air of great nobility; he allowed the skirt of his buffalo robe to fall, and addressing the anxious and attentive assembly:

"I have heard the strain of the walkon, the beloved bird of the Wacondah, echo in my ears," he said; "its harmonious voice penetrated to my heart, and caused it to quiver with joy. My sons are good, and I love them. The Jester, and ten warriors to be chosen by himself, will accompany me, and the others will ride to the great villages of my nation to announce to the sachems the return of Eagle-head among his brothers. I have spoken."

The Jester then asked for the great calumet, which was immediately brought him by the pipe-bearer, and the chiefs smoked in turn, without uttering a word. When the last puff of smoke had dispersed, the hachesto, to whom the Jester had said a few words in a low voice, proclaimed the names of the ten warriors selected to accompany the sachem. The chiefs rose, bowed to Eagle-head, and silently mounting their horses, started at a gallop.

For a considerable period the Jester and Eagle-head conversed in a low voice: at the end of the palaver, the Jester and his warriors went off in their turn, Eagle-head, Belhumeur, and Don Louis remaining alone. The Canadian watched the Indians depart, and when they had disappeared he turned to the chief.

"Hum!" he said, "will not the hour soon arrive to speak frankly and terminate our business? Since our departure from home we have troubled ourselves a great deal about others, and forgotten our own affairs: is it not time to think of them?"

"Eagle-head does not forget; he is preparing to satisfy his pale brothers."

Belhumour burst out laughing.

"Excuse me, chief; for my part, my business is very simple. You asked me to accompany you, and here I am. May I be a dog of an Apache Indian if I know

anything more! With Louis, it is different, he is looking for a well-beloved friend; remember that we have promised to help him to find him."

"Eagle-head," the chief replied, "has shared his heart between his two white brothers; each has half. The road we have to go is long, and must last several moons. We shall cross the great desert. The Jester and his warriors have gone to kill buffaloes for the journey. I will lead my white brothers to a spot which I discovered a few moons ago, and which is only known to myself. The Wacondah, when he created man, gave him strength, courage, and immense hunting-grounds, saying to him, 'Be free and happy.' He gave the pale-faces wisdom and science, by teaching them to know the value of sparkling stones and yellow pebbles. The red-skins and the pale-faces each follow the path the Great Spirit has traced for them. I am leading my brothers to a placer."

"To a placer!" the two men exclaimed in amazement.

"Yes. What would an Indian sachem do with these enormous treasures, which he knows not how to use? Gold is everything with the pale-faces. Let my brothers be happy; Eagle-head will give them more than they can ever take."

"An instant, chief. What the deuce would you have me do with your gold? I am a hunter, whom his horse and rifle suffice. At the period that I crossed the prairie in the company of Loyal-heart, we frequently found rich nuggets beneath our feet, and ever turned from them with contempt."

"What need have we of gold?" Don Louis supported his friend. "Let us forget this placer, however rich it may be. Let us not reveal its existence to any one, for crimes enough are committed daily for gold. Give up this scheme, chief. We thank you for your generous offer, but it is impossible for us to accept it."

"Well spoken," Belhumeur exclaimed joyously. "Deuce take gold, which we can make no use of, and let us live like the free hunters we are! By heavens, chief, I assure you, had you told me at the time the object for which you wished me to follow you, I should have let you start alone."

"I expected the answer my brothers have given me," said Eagle-head. "I am happy to see that I have not been mistaken. Yes, gold is useless to them—they are right; but that is not a motive for despising it. May it not serve some day to save one of their friends from despair?"

"That is true," said Don Louis, touched by the justice of this reasoning. "What you say is wise, and deserves consideration." We can refuse to enrich ourselves; but we have no right to despise riches, which may possibly, at some future day, serve others."

"If that is really your opinion I adopt it; besides, as we are on the road, it is as well to go to the end."

On this Belhumeur rose, took his gun, and went off whistling. The Jester was two days absent. About the middle of the third day he reappeared. Six horses lassoed in the prairie were loaded with provisions; six others carried skins filled with water. Eagle-head was satisfied with the way in which the chief had performed his mission; but as the journey they had to make was a long one, he ordered that each horseman should carry on his saddle, with his alforjas, two little water-skins.

All these measures having been carefully taken, the horses and their riders rested. Fresh and of good cheer, the next morning, at daybreak, the little troop started in the direction of the desert. We will say nothing of the journey, save that it was successful, and accomplished under the most favourable auspices: no incident occurred to mar its monotonous tranquillity. The Comanches and their friends crossed the desert like a tornado, with that headlong speed of which they alone possess the secret, and which renders them so dangerous when they invade the Mexican frontiers.

On arriving in the prairies of the Sierra de los Comanches, Eagle-head ordered the Jester and his warriors to await him in a camp which he formed on the skirt of a virgin forest, in an immense clearing on the banks of an unknown stream, which, after a course of several leagues, falls into the Rio del Norte, and then departed with his comrades. The sachem foresaw everything. Although he placed entire confidence in the Jester, he did not wish, through prudential motives, to let him know the site of the placer. At a later date he had cause to congratulate himself on this step.

The hunters pushed on straight for the mountains, which rose before them like apparently insurmountable granitic walls; but the nearer they approached the more the mountains sloped down. They soon entered a narrow gorge, at the entrance of which they were forced to leave their horses. It was probably owing to this apparently futile circumstance that the placer had not yet been discovered by the Indians, for the red-skins never, under any circumstances, dismount. It may justly be said of them, as of the Gauchos of the Pampas, in the Banda Oriental and Patagonia, that they live on horseback.

By a singular accident during one of his hunts, a deer which Eagle-head had wounded entered this gorge to die. The chief, who had been following the animal for several hours, did not hesitate to go in quest of it. After traversing the whole length of the gorge he reached a valley, a species of funnel formed between two abrupt mountains, which, except on this side, rendered access not only difficult but impossible. There he found the deer expiring on a sand sprinkled with gold dust, and sown with nuggets, which sparkled like diamonds in the sunshine.

On entering the valley the hunters could not repress a cry of admiration and a shudder of delight. However strong a man may be morally, gold possesses an irresistible attraction, and exerts a powerful fascination over him.

"Oh, oh!" Belhumeur said, wiping the perspiration which poured down his face, "there are fortunes enough hidden in this nook of earth. God grant that they may remain so a long time, for the happiness of mankind!"

"What shall we do?" Louis asked.

Eagle-head alone regarded these incalculable riches with an indifferent glance.

"Hum!" the Canadian continued, "this is evidently our property, as the chief surrenders it to us."

The sachem made a sign of affirmation.

"Hear what I propose," he continued. "We do not need this gold, which at this moment would be more injurious to us than useful. Still, as no one can foresee the future, we must assure ourselves of the ownership. Let us cover this sand with leaves and branches, so that if accident lead a hunter to the top of one of these mountains, he may not see the gold glistening; then we will pile up stones, and close the mouth of the valley. What is your opinion?"

"To work!" Don Louis exclaimed. "I am anxious not to have my eyes dazzled longer."

"To work, then!" Belhumeur replied.

The three men cut down branches from the trees, and formed with them a thick carpet, under which the auriferous sand and nuggets entirely disappeared.

"Will you not take a specimen of the nuggets?" Belhumeur said to the count. "Perhaps it may be useful to take a few."

"My faith, no!" the latter replied, shrugging his shoulders; "I do not care for it. Take some if you will: for my part, I will not soil my fingers with them."

The Canadian began laughing, and picked up two or three nuggets as large as walnuts.

"Sapristi!" he said, "if I kill sundry Apaches with these they will have no right to complain, I hope."

They quitted the valley, the entrance to which they stopped up with masses of rock. They then regained their horses, and returned to the camp, after cutting notches in the trees, so as to be able to recognise the spot, if, at a later date, circumstances led them to the placer, which, we are bound to say in their favour, not one of them desired.

The Jester was awaiting his friends with the intensest impatience. The prairie was not quiet. In the morning the runners had perceived a small band of pale-faces crossing the Del Norte. At this moment a large Apache war-party had crossed the river at the same spot, apparently following a trail.

"Oh, oh!" Belhumeur said, "it is plain that these dogs are pursuing white people."

"Shall we let them be massacred beneath our eyes?" Louis exclaimed indignantly.

"My faith, no! If it depend on us," the hunter said, "perhaps this good action will obtain our pardon for covetousness. Speak, Eagle-head! what will you do?"

"Save the pale-faces, the chief replied.

The orders were immediately given by the sachem, and executed with that intelligence and promptitude characteristic of picked warriors on the war-trail. The horses were left under the guard of a Comanche, and the detachment divided into two parties. With the exception of Eagle-head, the Jester, Louis, and Belhumeur, who had rifles, all the others were armed with lances and bows.

"Diamond cut diamond," the Canadian said in a low voice.

At this moment two shots were heard, and then the war-cry of the Apaches re-echoed.

"Oh, oh!" Belhumeur said, rushing forward, "they do not fancy we are so near."

All the others followed him at full speed. In the meanwhile the combat had assumed horrible proportions in the cavern. Don Sylva and the peons resisted courageously.

The Tigrero and the Black Bear, interlaced like two serpents, were seeking to stab each other. Don Martial, when he perceived the Indian, leaped back so precipitately that he cleared the passage and reached the hall, in the centre of which was the abyss to which we before alluded. It was on the verge of this gulf that the two men, with flashing eyes, heaving chests, and lips closed by fury, redoubled their efforts.

Suddenly several shots were heard, and the war-cry of the Comanches burst forth like thunder. The Black Bear loosed his hold of Don Martial, leaped on his feet, and rushed on Dona Anita; but the girl repulsed the savage by a supernatural effort. The latter, already wounded by the Tigrero's pistols, tottered backwards to the edge of the abyss, where he lost his balance. He felt that all was over. By an instinctive effort he stretched out his arms, seized Don Martial (who, half stunned by the contest he had been engaged in, was trying to rise), made him totter in his turn, and the two fell to the bottom of the abyss, uttering a horrible cry.

Dona Anita rushed forward: she was lost—when suddenly she felt herself seized by a vigorous hand, and rapidly dragged backwards. She fainted.

The Comanches had arrived too late. Of the seven persons composing the little band, five had been killed, a peon seriously wounded, and Dona Anita alone survived. The young girl had been saved by Belhumeur. When she opened her eyes again she smiled gently, and in a childlike voice, melodious as a bird's carol, began singing a Mexican seguedilla. The hunters recoiled with a cry of horror. Dona Anita was mad.

CHAPTER XXIV.

EL AHUEHUELT.

* * * * * *

THE Count de Lhorailles entered the great Del Norte desert under the guidance of Cucharès. During the first day all went on famously; the weather was magnificent—the provisions more than plentiful. With their innate carelessness, the Frenchmen forgot their past fears, and laughed at the alarm which the Mexican peons did not cease manifesting; for, better informed, they did not conceal the terror which the prolonged stay of the company in this terrible region caused them.

But the days were spent in the desert in wandering purposelessly in search of the Apaches, who had at length become invisible. At times they perceived an Indian horseman in the distance, apparently mocking them, who presently came up close to their lines. "Boot and saddle" was sounded; everybody mounted, and pursued this phantom horseman, who suddenly disappeared like a vision.

This mode of life, however, through its very monotony, began to grow insipid and insupportable. To see nothing but gray sand, ever sand—not a bird or a wild beast—tawny, weather-worn rocks—a few lofty ahuehuelts—a species of cedar, with long bare branches, covered with a grayish moss hanging in heavy festoons—had nothing very amusing about it. The troop began to grow dispirited. The reflection of the sun on the sand caused ophthalmia; the water, decomposed by the heat, was no longer drinkable; the provisions were spoiling; and scurvy had commenced its ravages among the soldiers. This state of things was growing intolerable; measures must be taken to get out of it as rapidly as possible.

The count formed his officers into a council; and it was composed of Lieutenants Martin Leroux and Diégo Léon, Sergeant Boileau, Blas Vasquez, and Cucharès. These five persons, presided over by the count, took their seats on bales, while a short distance off, the soldiers, reclining on the ground, tried to shelter themselves beneath the shadow of their picketed horses.

It was urgent to assemble it, for the company was rapidly demoralising;

there was revolt in the air, and complaints had already been openly uttered. The execution at the Casa Grande was completely forgotten; and if a remedy were not soon found, no one knew what terrible consequences this general dissatisfaction might not entail.

"Gentlemen," the Count de Lhorailles said, "I have assembled you in order to consult with you on the means to put a stop to the despondency which has fallen on our company during the last few days. The circumstances are so serious that I shall feel obliged by your giving me your frank opinion. Everybody has the right to express his opinion without fear of wounding the self-love of any one. Speak first, Sergeant Boileau: as the lowest in rank, you must take the word first."

The sergeant was an old African soldier, knowing his duties perfectly—a thorough trooper in the fullest sense of the word; but we must confess that he was nothing of an orator. At this direct challenge from his chief he smiled, blushed like a girl, let his head droop, opened an enormous mouth, and stopped short. The count, perceiving his embarrassment, kindly urged him to speak. At length, after many an effort, the sergeant managed to begin in a hoarse and perfectly indistinct voice.

"Hang it, captain!" he said presently, "I can understand that the situation is not at all pleasant; but what is to be done? A man is a trooper, or he is not. Hence my opinion is that you ought to act as you think proper; and we are here to obey you in every respect, as is our peremptory duty, without any subsequent or offensive after-thought."

The officers could not refrain from laughing at the worthy sergeant's profession of faith.

"It is your turn, capataz," the captain said. "Give us your opinion."

Blas Vasquez fixed his burning eyes on the count.

"Do you really ask it frankly?" he said.

"Certainly I do."

"Then listen," he said in a firm voice, and with an accent bearing conviction. "My opinion is that we are betrayed; that we shall all perish in pursuing invisible enemies, who have caused us to fall into a trap."

These words produced a great impression on the hearers, who understood their perfect truth. The captain shook his head thoughtfully.

"Don Blas," he said, "you bring, then, a heavy accusation against some one."

"Yes," he replied; "but——"

"Remember that we can admit no vague suppositions. Things have reached such a pitch that, if you wish us to give you the credence you doubtlessly deserve, you must bring your charges precisely, and not shrink from pronouncing any name if it be necessary."

"I shall shrink from nothing, senor conde. I know all the responsibility I take on myself. No consideration, however powerful it may be, will make me conceal what I regard as a sacred duty."

"Speak, then, in Heaven's name; and God grant that your words may not compel me to inflict an exemplary chastisement on one of our comrades!"

The capataz collected himself for a moment. All anxiously awaited his explanation. Cucharès especially was suffering from an emotion which he found great difficulty in concealing. Blas Vasquez at length spoke again, while keeping his eye so fixed on the count that the latter began to understand that he and his men were the victims of some odious treachery.

"Senor conde," Blas said, "we Mexicans have a law from which we never depart—a law which, indeed, is inscribed in the hearts of all honest men. It is

this: in the same way that the pilot is responsible for the ship instrusted to him to take into port, the pioneer responds with his person for the safety of the people he undertakes to guide in the desert. Either the guide is ignorant, or he is not. If he is ignorant, why, against the opinion of everybody, has he forced us to enter the desert? Why, if he be not ignorant, did he not guide us straight across the desert as he agreed to do, instead of leading us at venture in pursuit of an enemy who but traverses the desert at his horse's utmost speed when forced to enter it? Hence on the guide alone must weigh the blame of all that has happened."

Cucharès, more and more perturbed, knew not what countenance to keep; his emotion was visible to all.

"What reply have you to make?" the captain asked him.

Under circumstances like the present, the man attacked has only two means of defence—to feign indignation or contempt. Cucharès chose the latter. Summoning up all his boldness and impudence, he raised his voice, shrugged his shoulders disdainfully, and answered in an ironical tone,—

"I will not do Don Blas the honour of discussing his remarks: there are certain accusations which an honest man scorns to repel. It was my duty to act in conformity with the orders of the captain, who alone commands here. Since we have been in the desert we have lost twenty men, killed by the Indians or by disease. Can I be logically rendered responsible for this misfortune? If the captain had merely ordered me to cross the desert, we should have done so long ago: he told me that he wished to catch the Apaches, and I was compelled to obey him."

These reasons, specious as they were, were still accepted as good by the officers. Cucharès breathed again.

"Good!" the capataz said. "Strictly speaking, you might be right in your remarks; but I bring other and graver charges against you."

The lepero shrugged his shoulders once more.

"I know, and can supply proof, that, by your remarks and insinuations, you sow discord and rebellion among the peons and troopers. This morning, before the *réveillé*, believing that no one saw you, you rose, and with your dagger pierced ten of the fifteen water-skins still left us. The noise I made in running toward you alone prevented the entire consummation of your crime. At the moment when the captain gave us orders to assemble, I was about to warn him of what you had done. What have you to answer to this? Defend yourself, if it be possible."

All eyes were fixed on the lepero. He was livid. His eyes, suffused with blood, were haggard. Before it was possible to guess his intention, he drew a pistol and fired at the capataz, who fell without uttering a cry; then with a tiger-bound he leaped on his horse, and started at full speed. All rushed in pursuit of the lepero.

"Down with the murderer!" the captain shouted, urging his men by voice and gestures to seize the villain.

The Frenchmen, rendered furious by this pursuit, began firing on Cucharès as on a wild beast. For a long time he was seen galloping his horse in every direction, and seeking in vain to quit the circle in which the troopers had inclosed him. At length he tottered in his saddle, tried to hold on by his horse's mane, and rolled in the sand, uttering a parting yell of fury. He was dead!"

This event caused extreme excitement among the soldiers: from this moment they felt that they were betrayed, and began to see their position as it really was—that is to say, desperate. In vain did the captain try to restore them a little courage; they would listen to nothing, but yielded to that despair which dis-

organises and paralyses everything. The count gave the order for departure, and they set out.

But whither should they go? In what direction turn? No trace was visible. Still they marched on, rather to change their place than in the hope of emerging from the sepulchre of sand in which they believed themselves eternally buried. Eight days passed away—eight centuries—during which the adventurers endured the most frightful tortures of thirst and hunger. The troop no longer existed; there were neither chiefs nor soldiers; it was a legion of hideous phantoms, a flock of wild beasts ready to devour each other on the first opportunity.

They had been reduced to splitting the ears of the horses and mules in order to drink the blood.

Wandering now on this side, now on that, deceived by the mirage, dazzled by the burning sunbeams, they were a prey to a hideous despair. Some laughed with a silly air; and these were the happiest, for they no longer felt their sufferings: they were mad. Others brandished their weapons furiously, raising their fists, with menaces and curses, to heaven, which, like an immense plate of red-hot iron, seemed the implacable dome of their sandy tomb. Some, rendered raging by suffering, blew out their brains while mocking their comrades who were too weak-minded to follow their example.

The French are, perhaps, the bravest nation in existence; but, on the other hand, the easiest to demoralise. If their impulse is irresistible in the onward march, it is the same when they give way. Nothing will stop them—neither reasoning nor coercive measures. Extreme in everything, the Frenchman is more than a man, or less than a child.

The Count de Lhorailles, gloomy and heart-broken, surveyed the ruin of all his hopes. Ever the first to march, the last to rest, not eating a mouthful till he was certain that all his comrades had their share, he watched with unexampled tenderness and care over these poor soldiers, who, strangely enough, in the misery in which they were plunged, never dreamed of addressing a reproach to him.

Of Blas Vasquez's peons the majority were dead. The rest had sought safety in flight; that is, they had gone a little further on to seek a hidden tomb. All those who remained faithful to the captain were Europeans, principally Frenchmen, brave Dauph'yeers, utterly ignorant of the way to combat and conquer the implacable enemy against whom they were struggling—the desert! Of the two hundred and forty-five men of which the squadron was composed on its entering the Del Norte, one hundred and thirty-three still survived, if we allow that these haggard, fleshless spectres were men.

The most atrocious pain which a man can suffer in the desert is the frightful malady called *calentura* by the Mexicans. The calentura! that temporary madness, which makes you see, during its intermittent attacks, the most dainty and delicious dishes, the most limpid water, the most exquisite wines; which satiates and enervates you; and, when it leaves you, renders you more desponding, more broken, than before, for you retain the remembrance of all you possessed during your dream.

One day, at length, the wretched men, crushed by misery and tortures of every description, refused to go further, and resolved to die where accident had led them. They lay down in the torrid sand, beneath the shadow of a few ahuehuelts, with the firm will of remaining motionless until death, which they had summoned so loudly, came at length to deliver them from their woes. The sun set in a mist of purple and gold, to the sound of the curses and imprecations of these wretched men, who, expecting nothing more, hoping nothing more, had only retained the cruel instincts of the wild beast.

Still the night succeeded to day—gradually calmness took the place of disorder.

Sleep, that great consoler, weighed down the heavy eyelids of the men, who, if they did not sleep, fell into a state of somnolency, which brought a truce to their fearful tortures, if only for a few moments. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, a formidable sound aroused them--a fiery whirlwind passed over them—the thunder burst forth in terrific peals. The sky was black as ink—not a star not a moonbeam—nothing but a dense gloom, which hid the nearest objects from sight.

The poor fellows rose in great terror; they dragged themselves on as well as they could one after the other, crouching together like a flock of sheep surprised by a storm, wishing, with that inborn egotism of man, to die together.

"A temporal, a temporal!" all shouted with an expression of voice impossible to render.

It was in reality the temporal, that fearful scourge, which was unloosing all its fury, and passing over the desert to subvert its surface. The wind howled with extraordinary force, raising clouds of dust, which whirled round with extreme velocity, and formed enormous spouts, that ran along and suddenly burst with a frightful crash. Men and animals caught in the tornado were whisked away into space like straws.

"Down on the ground!" the count shouted in a tremendous voice; "down on the ground! 'Tis the African simoon! Down, all of you who care for life!"

Strange to say, all these men, weighed down by atrocious sufferings, obeyed their chief's orders like children, so great is the terror death inspires in the darkness. They buried their faces in the sand, in order to avoid the burning blast of air that passed over them. The animals crouched on the ground, with outstretched necks, instinctively followed their example. At intervals, when the wind granted a moment's respite to these unhappy men, whom it took a delight in torturing, cries and groans of agony could be heard, mingled with blasphemies and ardent prayers, that rose from the crowd stretched trembling on the earth.

The hurricane raged through the entire night with ever-increasing fury; toward morning it gradually grew calmer; by sunrise it had exhausted all its strength, and rushed toward other regions.

The aspect of the desert was completely changed. Where valleys had been on the previous night were now mountains; the sparse trees, twisted, uprooted, or burned by the hurricane, displayed their blackened and denuded skeletons; no trace of a footpath, no sign of man; all was flat. smooth, and even as a mirror. The French had been reduced to sixty men; the others had been carried off or swallowed up, and there was no hope of discovering the slightest signs of them: the sand was stretched over them like an immense grayish shroud.

The first feeling the survivors experienced was terror; the second, despair; and then the groans and complaints broke out again with renewed strength. The count, gloomy and sad, regarded these poor people with an expression of the tenderest pity. Suddenly he burst out into a feverish laugh, and going up to his horse, which had hitherto, by a species of miracle, escaped disaster, he saddled it, while gently patting it and humming a wild tune between his teeth.

His companions watched him with a feeling of vague terror, for which they could not account. Although they were so miserable, their captain still represented superior intellect and a firm will, those two forces which have so much power over coarse natures, even when circumstances have forced them to deny them. In their wretched condition they collected round their chief, like children seek shelter on their mother's breast. He had ever consoled them, giving them an example of courage and abnegation; thus, when they saw him acting as he was doing, they had a foreboding of evil.

When his horse was saddled. the count leaped lightly on its back, and for a few minutes he made the animal curvet, though it had the greatest difficulty in keeping on its feet.

"Hold, my fine fellows!" he suddenly shouted. "Come up here! You had better listen to some good advice—a parting hint I wish to give you before I go."

The soldiers dragged themselves up as well as they could and surrounded him.

The count turned a glance of satisfaction around.

"Existence is a miserable farce, is it not?" he said, bursting into a laugh; "and it is often a heavy chain to drag about. How many times, since we have been wandering about this desert, have I had the thought which I now utter openly! Well, I confess to you, as long as I had a hope of saving you, I struggled courageously: that hope I no longer possess. As we must die of want within a few days—a few hours, perhaps—I prefer to finish it at once. Believe me, you had better follow my example. It is soon done, as you shall see."

While uttering the last words he drew a pistol from his waist-belt. At this moment cries were heard.

"What is it? What is the matter?"

"Look, captain! People are coming at last to our help: we are saved!" Sergeant Boileau exclaimed, rising like a spectre by his side, and seizing his arm.

The count freed himself with a smile.

"You are mad, my poor comrade," he said, looking in the direction indicated, where a cloud of dust really rose, and was rapidly approaching; "no one can come to our aid. We have not even," he added, with bitter irony, "the resource of the shipwrecked crew of the *Meduse!* We are condemned to die in this infernal desert! Farewell, all—farewell!"

He raised the pistol.

"Captain," the sergeant cried reproachfully, "take care! You have no right to kill yourself. You are our chief, and must be the last to die; if not, you are a coward!"

The count bounded as though a serpent had stung him, and made a gesture as if to rush on the sergeant. The expression of his face was so savage, his movement so terrible, that the sergeant was terrified, and recoiled. The captain profited by this second of respite, put the muzzle of the pistol to his temple, and pulled the trigger. He fell to the ground, with his skull fractured.

The adventurers had not yet recovered from the stupor this frightful event had thrown them into, when the cloud of dust they had noticed burst violently asunder, and they perceived a troop of mounted Indians, in the midst of whom were a woman and two or three white men, galloping toward them at full speed. Convinced that the Apaches had come up to deal them the final blow, like vultures collecting round a fallen buffalo, they did not even attempt an impossible resistance.

"Oh!" one of the hunters shouted, as he leaped from his horse and rushed toward them, "the poor fellows!"

The new comers were Belhumeur, Louis, and their friends the Comanches. In a few words they were apprised of all that had happened, and the tortures the French had endured.

"Good heavens!" Belhumeur shouted, "if provisions failed, you had water in abundance; then why do you complain of thirst?"

Without saying a word, Eagle-head and the Jester dug up the ground with their knives at the foot of an ahuehuelt. Within ten minutes an abundant stream of limpid water poured along the sand. The Frenchmen rushed in disorder toward it.

"Poor fellows!" Don Louis murmured, "shall we not take them from this spot?"

"Do you think I would let them perish, now I have restored them to hope? Poor girl!" casting a melancholy glance at Dona Anita, who was laughing and cracking her fingers like castanets, "why is it not equally easy to restore her to reason?"

Don Louis sighed, but made no reply.

The French then learned a thing which would have saved them all, probably, had they known it sooner—that the ahuehuelt, which, in the Comanche Indian dialect, signifies the *Lord of the Waters*, is a tree which grows in arid spots, and its presence ever indicates either a spring flush with the soil or a hidden source; that for this reason the red-skins hold it in veneration; and, as it is principally found in the deserts, they designate it also by the name of the *Great Medicine of Travellers.*

* * * * * *

Two days later the adventurers, guided by the hunters and Comanches, quitted the desert. They speedily reached the Casa Grande of Moctecuzoma, where their saviours, after giving them the provisions they stood in such pressing need of, finally left them, hardly knowing how to escape from their hearty thanks and blessings.

[Those of our readers who have felt an interest in Don Louis will find his history continued in another volume, called "THE GOLD SEEKERS."]

THE END.

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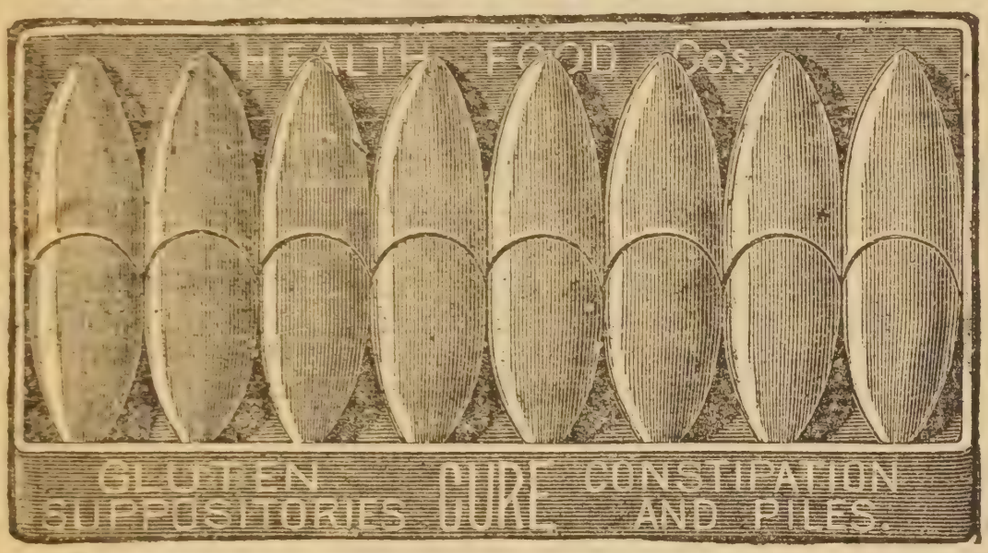

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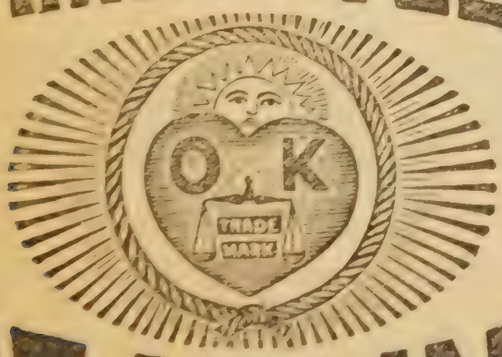

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